

Convergences 5: Crashing the Broker

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Convergences 5: Crashing the Broker

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Summary

Liara settles accounts with the Shadow Broker while the Gallena confirms that one of the Terran Empires and the Tal'Shiar have infiltrated this universe.

Act 1

“The bad news is that the hyperbarionic radiation combined with the ionic storms is barring use of the transporter.” Liara cautioned as she read the results from the scanner. “That means we’re going to have to board from the *Telara*.”

“What’s the good news?” Garrus bantered back.

“The good news is that the weather will mask their sensors so they won’t be able to spot us until we’ve already boarded.” Liara responded, handing the turian as well as her human/Trill hybrid companion their weapons. Now all business, the asari information broker declared, “We go in, rescue Feron, wreck the ship, and then get out.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Garrus replied as he checked the charge on his weapon.

“Drop point in thirty seconds.” The Romulan pilot called out.

“Right.” Cilla responded, hefting her rifle as the runabout bay door opened, the ship’s force field the only thing between them and Hagalaz’s fierce weather. “One...Two...” feeling Liara’s hand clutching hers, Cilla shouted as the trio leaped down on to the Broker’s ship, “Three!”

Almost falling off the ledge as she stumbled on landing, Liara felt a firm, yet warm hand grasping hers and pulling her back. Taking a deep breath, she smiled at the blonde woman who had just saved her from falling into the maelstrom. “Thank you, *siha*.”

A rare warm smile coming to her lips as she let go her asari companion’s hand, Cilla pointed to three drones approaching their position, “We’ve got company.”

“Maintenance drones.” Liara declared as she pointed her phaser at them and fired. “Not dangerous, but they’ll give away our position if we let them.”

“Time to turn them into scrap.” Garrus announced as he fired at the drones, downing all three in rapid succession. “And that girls...” the turian sniper grinned, “is how it’s done.”

“There might be an entranceway over there.” Cilla gestured towards where the drones had emerged earlier.

“Good idea.” Liara affirmed, “Let’s go.”

“So far...so good. We haven’t run across any real opposition yet—just these drones.” Garrus remarked as he and his companions downed another trio of maintenance drones. Then, spotting several Loki mechs, the turian vigilante sighed as he pointed at the mechs, “Me and my big mouth. We’ve got incoming!”

“Cover me!” Cilla shouted as she sprinted towards what appeared to be lightning rods.

“Be careful!” Liara shouted back, catching three of the mechs in a singularity and then following it up with a warp, the resulting implosion showering the area in mech pieces and fragments.

“Got the one at two o’clock.” Garrus clinically stated as he fired his phaser sniper rifle, downing two mechs in succession.

“Got it!” Cilla shouted triumphantly as she triggered the capacitors, the stored energy catching the rest of the mechs in its field, instantly rendering them scrap.

“Don’t you dare scare me like that again!” Liara quipped hiding her worry with a joking remark. “I’d think getting thrown off of one roof in a twenty-four-hour period would have been enough for you.”

“I knew you’d be there to catch me.” Cilla replied, half bantering—half serious.

Liara answered back, a delicate shade of blue appearing on her cheeks, “Well...do me a favor and let me know if you’re going to do something like that again.”

“Ladies?” Garrus cleared his throat. “We’ve got more company.”

“This time real mercenaries.” Cilla remarked, her eyes quickly spotting another pair of capacitors. “Do you see them Liara?”

“Yes, I do.” A sly grin appeared on the asari’s face.

“So do I.” Garrus remarked, also with an evil grin. “Liara...Cilla...you two know what to do.”

“Right.” Both teammates replied simultaneously.

Acting as one, Liara’s throw, Garrus’s shots at the capacitors, and Cilla’s photon grenade struck at the same time. Smiling at the resultant explosion, the turian vigilante joked, “Another obstacle cleared.”

“We should be close to the main hatch.” Liara commented as the tiny group clambered up to where the mercenaries had fallen.

Inclining his head at the body of one of the fallen mercenaries, the turian sniper commented, “You might want to take a look at him. He’s not your standard merc.”

Examining the dead man and the weapons he was carrying, the information broker replied, “You’re right, Garrus. Cilla…what do make of that uniform?”

“Terran Empire.” The Dutch tactical officer replied as she immediately recognized the gaudy blue and gold uniform. “From one of the mirror universes in the *Discovery* timeline, I’d say.” Picking up his pistol, she grimaced, “Agonizer phaser. Nasty piece of work. We’re going to need to adjust our shields to compensate. You do not want to get hit by one of those.”

“I’ll take your word for it.” Garrus responded with a wry grin. “So…is he the only one or do you think there might be more?”

“I’m betting there are probably only two or three more if they’re here in an advisory capacity.” Cilla responded, “I have a feeling they’re here to train the Shadow Broker’s mercs. That means…”

“We’ll be dealing with more of those phasers.” Liara finished with a frown.

“That’s a good bet.” Cilla nodded, further advising, “I’d suggest making any of them that you see your priority target.”

“Took the words right out of my mouth.” Garrus replied, inclining his head, “That’s probably the way to the entrance hatch.”

“It looks like it.” Cilla agreed, “Shall we go?”

“It’s going to take some time to crack that lock.” Liara declared, examining the interface.

“The moment you do, it’ll probably also set off every alarm on the ship.” Garrus pointed out with a scowl as he scanned the immediate area, “Thankfully, we’ve got good cover. Drones might be a problem though. Ideas?”

“Liara?” Cilla asked, turning to the lovely asari crouched by door.

“I can throw up a biotic barrier that should hold until the drones can be taken out.” Liara replied, “But you’ll have to move quickly. I won’t be able to keep it up for long—especially under heavy pounding.”

“Right.” Garrus nodded his head in acknowledgement, “Cilla? Will a biotic barrier work against photon or plasma grenades if we run into one of those Empire types?”

“Short term—in combination with our shields and armor—yes.” The Starfleet tactical officer responded, “But…as Liara said…they won’t buy us much time. The quicker we take them out—the better.”

“We better take them out quick then.” Garrus answered back as he recharged his rifle.

“Everyone ready?” Liara called out, “I’m about to activate the bypass.”

“Go.” Cilla responded, crouching under cover, her finger on her phaser’s firing button.

“Now!” Liara shouted, “Get ready!”

Alarms blaring immediately after she began the bypass, Garrus shouted loudly to make himself heard as he fired his rifle, “Drones…five o’clock!”

“One down!” Cilla yelled, her phaser disintegrating one of the drones. Wincing as a barrage of missiles impacted harmlessly against her asari companion’s biotic barrier, she shouted her appreciation, “Thanks, *lieveling*.”

“Don’t mention it, *siha*.” Liara yelled back, a slight smile appearing on her face, “Two more at three o’clock! I’ve got ‘em!” She shouted as she snagged the two drones in a singularity, making them easy targets for Garrus’s and Cilla’s phasers.

“That’s it for the first wave.” Garrus remarked, “Stay on your toes though…next one’ll be coming soon.”

“Mercs inbound at four o’clock!” Cilla shouted as she fired her phaser at an onrushing asari vanguard.

“There’s a Terran with them!” Garrus announced in a loud voice as a phaser bolt barely missed him, grazing his personal shield in the process.

“Got him!” Liara exclaimed as she lifted the Terran advisor biotically. “Now, *siha*!”

“Right, *lieveling*!” Cilla replied, firing her phaser, hitting the Terran square on the chest as Liara followed up with a biotic push that propelled the man screaming away from the ship and into the raging electrical storm.

“That’s the last of them!” Garrus announced as the bypass alarm beeped.

“Door’s open!” Liara exclaimed, pointing to the hatch, “Hurry before they send in another wave.”

Dashing into the ship, the trio paused for a moment to catch their breaths as the alarms blared. “They’ll be waiting for us.” Garrus declared with a frown. “Narrow corridor…not much in the way of cover. Gonna be rough.”

“That’s why I brought some stun and smoke grenades along with the photons.” Cilla coolly responded. “Still…it won’t be easy.”

“No…” Liara agreed, “But we have to try.”

Taking a deep breath, Garrus loaded a fresh charge into his rifle, “What are we waiting for?”

Hagalaz—RRW Gallena

As the *Gallena* entered the Sowilo System through the mass relay, V’lana commanded, “Contact the *Telara*.”

“Receiving a response—narrow channel subspace and scrambled.” Samantha Traynor responded from the comm station.

“Put it through.”

“*Gallena...Terran Empire warship...Akira-class...has just entered orbit.*”

“Have they detected you yet?”

“*Negative. Still under cloak and have retreated to an ionic pocket. Orders?*”

“Remain in position in case you have to do an emergency pickup of the landing party.” V’lana ordered, “We’ll deal with the starship.”

“*Acknowledged. Telara out.*”

“Picking up a ship on the scanners.” Satra reported from her science station. “*Akira-class.*”

“Someone want to fill the asari newbie in on what’s going on?” The newest member of the *Gallena* family, sitting on one of the chairs next to the center seat tentatively spoke up.

“It could be bad news.” V’lana replied, “It depends on which mirror universe that Terran Empire ship comes from...” V’lana mused in a soft voice as Anaya, noting the grave expressions on the faces of her friend and the others on the bridge queried with a worried frown.

“What do you mean...which ‘mirror universe’?”

“It’ll take too long to explain now...” V’lana replied, “But...short version...they’re from a universe that’s different from both yours and mine. In their universe, instead of humans belonging to an open and generally peaceful Federation or a somewhat more insular Systems Alliance, they’re more aggressive and xenophobic and are at the head of an aggressive and expansionist Terran Empire. The problem is that there are some Terran Empires that you can get along with. Those Terran Empires are actually not that much different from us—just a little more...well...it’s difficult to explain. When you see Zsa-Zsa and her crew, you’ll understand.”

“Zsa-Zsa?”

“A friend.” V’lana smirked. “Her and her ship came from a universe with a Terran Empire that’s...well...it’s not a mirror universe. More like an alternate universe with a twist. Then...” the lovely Romulan took a deep breath, “there are the others. The real mirror universes. They tend to be very brutal and...you could say...barbaric—especially the ones that stem from the *Discovery* timeline. We’re going to need to get close to find out which one we’re dealing with.”

“Good thing you’ve got that cloak thing then.” Anaya remarked in a light tone to hide her growing anxiety.

“Don’t worry.” V’lana whispered back reassuringly. “This is a good ship and crew and I like to think of myself as being a very good battle commander.”

“I hope so.” Anaya joked back.

“Never lost a fight yet.” V’lana bantered back with a reassuring smile. Then, wiping the grin off her face, the subcommander, now all business, ordered, “General quarters. Red alert. Maintain cloak. Power to weapons. Joker...bring us in on attack vector. Tovan...be ready to execute Attack Pattern Alpha on my command.”

“Aye, Subcommander.” Both executive officer and helmsman responded in unison as Solana reported from the tactical station, “All weapons online. Plasma cannons and torpedoes ready for action.”

As the lighting changed and an alarm chime rang out, Oriana’s father, at once noticing the change in expression on the faces of the medical staff as they began their preparations, asked nervously, “What’s going on?”

“Miri?” Oriana pleaded with a worried look on her face, “Is something happening?”

“General quarters.” Miranda replied, “The ship’s preparing to go into battle. I have to go to my station now.” The Australian biotic apologized, “Stay here in sickbay—it’s one of the best protected parts of the ship.”

“Don’t worry, Miranda.” Dr. Chakwas interjected in a reassuring tone, “We’ll take care of them.” Turning to the newly rescued family, the wise doctor smiled, “They know what they’re doing. We’ll be all right.”

After a brief, but intense, firefight, the trio entered what was obviously a detention area. "He has to be in here." Liara declared, the stony mask on her face hiding her worry as they passed one empty cell after another.

As they passed the last empty cell, Cilla placed her hand on the now disconsolate asari information broker's shoulder, "They might have moved him somewhere else, *lieveling*."

"Liara...Cilla..." Garrus's voice, now grave and somber, called out to the pair. "I think you should come here."

"What have you found?" Cilla asked, her normal icy expression hiding her worry at what the turian vigilante had discovered as she and Liara walked into what appeared to be an interrogation room.

"Goddess!" Liara gasped, her eyes tearing up at the sight she saw: a young drell male attached to electrodes and tubes, his eyes removed and his mouth frozen open in what appeared to be a scream of anguish. "What did they do to him? Why?"

"This was about more than simple interrogation." Garrus declared as Cilla tried in vain to console the crying asari. "This was inflicting pain purely for the purpose of inflicting pain."

"What sort of sadist would..."

"I've seen similar before." Cilla declared in a somber tone, asking Garrus, "Do drell normally have gills?"

"No." Liara interjected, stifling a sob, "Their homeworld until the hanar took as many of them off as they could was an arid world. Why do you ask?"

Taking a deep breath and exhaling, Cilla sighed, "Because I think I know who might have done it." After a momentary pause to collect her thoughts, the Dutch tactical officer explained, "It looks like it might be the work of the Solanae."

"Solanae?" Garrus interrupted.

"Yes." Cilla affirmed with a nod of her head. "They exist in a region of subspace. The first encounter with them that we know of was in 2369, my universe's chronology. They abducted several civilians and crew of the *Enterprise-D* and performed experiments on them and then tried to generate a pocket domain of their space in the *Enterprise*. Picard stopped them with a graviton pulse, but not before they sent out a signal. Ever since then, there have been reports of possible sightings. A few years ago, *USS Dayton*, while on patrol in the Celes Sector, found a freighter floating adrift. When they boarded and searched the ship, they found some...but not all...of the crew. All dead and all having had various experiments done on them."

"So..." Garrus took a deep breath as he covered the body, "The Shadow Broker is working with these Solonae?"

"It would appear so." Cilla asserted, "Now, the question is, are the Solonae acting alone or are they being used by someone else?"

Her facial expression now one of barely restrained fury, Liara exclaimed in an angry voice, "I don't care if we rip this ship apart. I am going to find out why."

"Then let us find out together." Cilla agreed.

With a scowl on his face, Garrus echoed his teammates' thoughts, "What are we waiting for? Time to get some answers."

Act 2

RRW Gallena

“Ten K...” Solana calmly called out the range to the Terran ship. “Eight...”

“When are you going to fire?” Anaya whispered.

“Soon.” V’lana whispered back, “We want to get as close as we can before we decloak. We don’t want to ruin the surprise after all.” Speaking up, she commanded, “You know the drill, Big Brother.”

“Aye, Little Sister.” The executive officer responded, and then issued orders to the tactical officer and helmsman. “Decloak and fire at five K. All weapons. Then maximum impulse and cloak once clear.”

“Aye, Centurion.” Solana replied, maintaining her level tone of voice.

“Gotcha, XO.” Joker responded with a smirk.

“Seven K...” As Solana read off the distance, Anaya gripped the arms of her chair tighter, and then felt a gentle touch on her forearm and the subcommander’s calm voice speaking to her in a low, almost inaudible, whisper.

“Relax. Trust me. My crew know what they’re doing and we’ve done this sort of thing many times.”

“Gotta admit...” Anaya whispered back, “I’m a little scared. I’m used to busting red sand gangs—not sitting ringside at a space battle.”

“It’s scary the first time.” V’lana whispered back, “And the second and the third. But you get used to it.”

“Six K. Five...”

“Decloak and fire!”

Shadow Broker’s Ship

“He’s throwing everything he’s got at us.” Garrus grumbled as a flashbang grenade exploded near his position, covering his eyes just in time to avoid being blinded.

“Must mean we’re getting closer.” Cilla replied as she fired her phaser, downing yet another mercenary. “Watch yourselves.” The Starfleet tactical officer warned, “A couple of them are packing agonizer phasers. If one of those gets through your armor and shields, you’re going to feel it.”

“Then we’ll have to avoid getting hit by them, *siha*.” Liara replied as she aimed a singularity in the center of the mercenaries’ position, following it up with a warp.

“Damn.” Garrus quipped as he again shielded his eyes from the biotic explosion. “That never gets old.”

“Shouldn’t be much further.” Liara declared as her Dutch companion downed the last of the mercenaries. “Then once we get there...” The asari information broker scowled as she biotically flung one of the bodies of the dead mercenaries against the wall. “We kill him for what he did to Feron.”

Placing a soothing hand on Liara’s shoulder, Cilla felt her friend shivering. “*Lieveling...*” the willowy blonde woman whispered, only to have the asari biotic shrug off her gesture of comfort.

“Not now, Cilla.” Liara responded in a low voice, “Not until this is over.”

“Then let us put an end to it.” Cilla answered back in an equally soft tone.

RRW Gallena

“Their shields took the brunt of the attack.” Satra declared as the Terran escort smartly turned about, its forward arc now focused on the Romulan warbird.

“For what we are about to receive.” V’lana muttered in a soft voice, warning the asari former detective sitting next to her, “Hold on to your seat...things are about to get rocky.”

“Full phaser and photon torpedo barrage.” Solana announced as phaser bolts and two blobs of energy raced towards the *Gallena*.

“Reinforce shields and hold tight!” The subcommander shouted as the energy beams and photon torpedoes impacted on the warbird’s shields.

“Shields down thirty percent!” Veril cried out. “Diverting secondary power. Shields firming.”

“Good job, Veril!” V’lana cried out, complementing her quick-thinking chief engineer before shouting, “Joker. Now we’re gonna see how

good you are. Course 140 degrees mark 20...Now!"

"Aye, subcommander." The ace helmsman responded as he smoothly carried out the ordered maneuver, putting the *Akira* squarely in the Romulan warbird's field of fire. "Now it's your turn, bitch." Joker swore as V'lana issued her next set of orders.

"Fire all forward weapons." Smiling in satisfaction as both plasma bolts and torpedoes impacted on their target, the subcommander barked out, "Maintain course, Joker. Maximum impulse. Cloak on my command. Solana! Be ready to drop those mines when I give the word."

"Ready!"

"Three...two...now! Drop mines! Cloak!"

Brilliant light filled the screen as the Romulan ship flew past the Terran starship, dropping quantum mines in its wake. "Their shields are down and they've taken hull damage." Satra reported. "Withdrawing at full impulse."

"We gonna chase 'em down?" Joker asked, almost pleading.

"No." V'lana shook her head. "This was too easy."

"Darian IV?" Tovan whispered under his breath.

"Exactly." V'lana responded, "I smell a trap. How much do you want to bet that there are one or more cloaked vessels lying in wait for us Big Brother?"

Anaya whispered in a low voice that only the lovely Romulan seated next to her could hear. "I don't know a damned thing about space combat, but I can smell a trap a thousand kilometers away and this one has ambush written all over it."

"I'll pass on that bet too, Little Sister." Tovan joked back before pointing out, "We know there's at least one Tal'Shiar ship operating in this universe and that is an old Tal'Shiar trick."

"Right. Besides having it pulled on us at Darian IV, we've also used it a time or two ourselves. Remember Nimbus III? When we teamed up with the *Belladonna* to take out that pirate gang?"

Tovan recollected for the benefit of those who were not there at the time, "Captain Rosza led them into an ambush we'd set up with the *D'ressa* under Commander Kaval."

"Good memory." V'lana smirked. "I'll bet a week of partying on the Citadel that there's a *Dedi* with tractor mines already laid out and either a *Mogai* or a squadron of *T'Varo* warbirds in cloak waiting for us. That's one trap we're not falling into. Much as I'd like to chase that *Akira* down, we'll play it smart. Besides..." she smirked, "I plan to set a little trap of our own just in case it decides to come back with friends."

"What do you have in mind?" Anaya whispered to the subcommander seated next to her.

Her lips turned up in a crooked grin, V'lana responded, "Watch." Speaking aloud, she addressed the communications specialist, "Samantha... see if you can raise the landing party."

"Aye, subcommander." After a few moments, Samantha ruefully announced, "I'm sorry...I can't break through all this magnetic and ionic interference."

"Right." V'lana nodded her head. "Solana...time to start laying out some mines of our own. I want quantum and tractor mines at these coordinates." She then called out a list of numbers. "Joker...bring us to that ion pocket in the north polar region, then I want all but essential systems killed. And then we'll see if they stumble into our trap or not."

ISS Imperator

"It doesn't look like our fish is going to take the bait." Captain Oliver, the commanding officer of *ISS Imperator* stated flatly to the garishly clad Romulan on his viewscreen, barely hiding his sneer of disdain.

In a voice equally dripping in contempt, the battle-scarred Tal'Shiar commander responded, "I didn't think she would. That traitress is well known for her guile."

"Do we pursue?" The Terran captain inquired, "There are four of us and only one of her and the capture or destruction of the only Republic warbird in this universe would be a great prize."

"That it would." The commander agreed, "But..." the devious Romulan's lips turned up in a sly grin, "we will do this intelligently. You will have the honor of leading the attack. Then when she pounces, we strike."

Nodding his head, Captain Oliver smirked, "A good plan. We will execute it immediately."

"Good. Launch attack."

"Captain..." The *Imperator's* executive officer, flashing his operatives a subtle hand signal as he approached his commanding officer, cleared his throat.

“What is it Holloway?” Oliver queried with a raised eyebrow, a signal to his own henchmen to prepare for trouble.

“Are we really going to allow ourselves to be used as bait by that Romulan turd?”

“Of course not.” The Terran captain sneered, “Once we’ve drawn the Republic warbird out, allow Commander Torek to launch his surprise attack and then...”

His lips also turning up in a sly grin as he signaled his henchmen to stand down, Commander Holloway finished his captain’s thoughts, “We pull back and let him take the brunt of the punishment.”

“Right.” Captain Oliver confirmed as he also signaled his own people to relax their guard for the moment. Lowering his voice to a conspiratorial whisper, the Terran captain explained to his wary subordinate, “I’m not supposed to pass this on, but I also cannot afford to have to worry about a knife in my back at an inconvenient time. We have orders to allow Commander Torek and his command to be destroyed without it being obvious. I cannot tell you much more, but I can tell you this much: our multi-universe operations have the personal attention of the Emperor himself. If we acquit ourselves well...I need not tell you the rewards both you and I shall enjoy.”

Responding with a subtle nod of his head, the ambitious executive officer replied, “Understood, Captain. And thank you for bringing me into your confidence. Long live the Emperor!”

“Long live the Emperor!”

Act 3: Endgame

The Shadow Broker's Ship—Endgame

"This is it." Liara declared with a steely glint in her eyes. "Command and control. The Shadow Broker has to be in here."

"Unless he's already dead or bailed." Garrus pointed out, sounding a cautionary note.

"No." The asari information broker shook her head, "There's too much in those databases for him...her...it...them...to just walk away. The Broker's in there...I feel it."

"You're putting a lot of faith in your intuition." Garrus warned.

"There's only one way to find out." Cilla replied as she readied her phaser. "And that's to go in."

Gathering her strength, Liara declared in a low voice, "Time to end this."

Bursting through the door, the trio at once came under a ferocious barrage of fire from above coming from mercenaries firing from behind heavy cover.

"That alcove!" Cilla shouted to her teammates pointing to a tiny enclosed area. "Hurry!"

"Shit!" Garrus cursed as Liara quickly threw up a biotic barrier, buying the team enough time to make it to the dubious safety of the alcove. "I think one of their shots got through my shields."

"Let me." Liara responded as she quickly administered medigel and a hypo to the wounded arm. "How does that feel?"

"Better." The turian sniper sighed as the blonde woman beside him laid down a barrage of suppressive fire from her phaser. "What's the situation?"

"Gone to hell." Cilla coolly replied as she continued to fire her weapon. "The good news is that this alcove is a good defensive position. They can't effectively fire on us from above and the entrance way is narrow so they can only come at us in ones or twos."

"And the bad news?"

"We're trapped. They can just wait us out and they know it." The Dutch tactical officer answered back. "And if they get tired of waiting... they'll simply use gas. While our filtration systems and Liara's biotic barrier will work for a while, in time they'll degrade to the point where the gas will get through."

"So, we're stuck." Garrus grumbled as he kept watch over the entrance.

"Not necessarily." Cilla grinned as she pointed to a console. "I think with Liara's help I can hack into the ship's computer and internal defense systems from here."

A sly grin appearing on his face, the turian sniper remarked, "We'll turn their own weapons against them."

"Exactly." Cilla replied, "However..."

"I'm going to have to buy you girls the time you need—right?"

"Correct." Liara answered back.

"Guess you two better get to work then." Garrus declared with a grin as he recharged his weapon, "Because they're coming."

RRW Gallena

"He's coming." Joker exclaimed as the Terran *Akira* appeared on the viewscreen.

"I'm not worried about the *Akira*." V'lana remarked, "It's the cloaked ships with him that are my concern."

"How are you going to flush them out?" Anaya inquired in a low voice.

With a smirk on her face, the Romulan subcommander replied, "Watch." Raising her voice so that the rest of the crew could hear her, she commanded, "Let them get closer...a little closer...Now, Veril! Hit them with the tachyon field."

"Aye, Subcommander!" The young Reman engineer responded, "Tachyon field activated."

Smiling in satisfaction as three Tal'Shiar *T'Varo* warbirds appeared well within her minefield, V'lana signaled her tactical officer, "Your turn, Solana. Activate the mines. Fire all weapons. Maximum torpedo scatter. Joker...maximum impulse...course 40 degrees mark 10." After a short pause during which two of the *T'Varos* exploded from the combined impact of mines and torpedoes, the subcommander ordered, "Now Joker! Execute!"

As the cocky helmsman smartly maneuvered the *Gallena* into its new attack arc, V'lana gave her executive officer a cheeky grin, "Now, Big

Brother.”

“Aye, Little Sister.” Tovan smirked back, commanding, “Execute Attack Plan Omega...Now! Full power to weapons. Concentrate on the remaining warbird...then pivot on the *Akira*.”

The screen illuminated by the explosion of the last warbird, Satra exclaimed, “The Terran *Akira* just warped out.”

“Did he just...” Anaya trailed off.

“Throw away those warbirds?” V’lana finished her friend’s thoughts, “Yes. Now...the question is...why would they do that?”

“Maybe the Terrans are playing their own game?” Tovan prompted.

Nodding her head as she contemplated her executive officer’s suggestion, V’lana responded, “Probably. The Terrans and Tal’Shiar are problematic allies under the best of circumstances as I’m sure that whoever is pulling all these strings is more than aware of. Hmm...” She mused, “It poses some interesting possibilities. If there are multiple factions...we might be able to play off one against the other.”

“As our string puller has been doing playing off Cerberus against the Systems Alliance...the mercenaries against each other and the Citadel...” Jodrum mused, “Could also explain the increase in activity of batarian terrorists and pirates.”

“Do you think the Undine might be at play here as well?” Tovan inquired with a raised eyebrow.

“I don’t see any reason why they wouldn’t be.” V’lana responded. “There’s no reason to think that either fluidic space or subspace couldn’t bridge the divide between the universes. I also wouldn’t rule out a Changeling acting either with or without the approval of the Dominion or even mirror Mass Effect universes.” Taking a deep breath, the youthful Romulan exhaled, “This web keeps getting more and more intricate the further we dig into it.” Taking another breath, she declared, “But that’s a topic for later. Right now, we’ve got people we need to get back. Ideas?”

“It’s difficult penetrating all the magnetic and ionic interference in the atmosphere, Subcommander.” Satra declared with a worried frown. Then, a big smile appearing on her face, she exclaimed, “I’ve located the ship they’re on.” Frowning, she reported, “I’m registering explosions on the ship.”

“Sabotage?” Tovan suggested only to have the science officer shake her head.

“No...” The readings indicate that the mass effect drive is being overloaded. If we don’t get our people out soon...”

“I’m open to suggestions.” V’lana urgently prompted, “Quickly, please.”

“I think I have an idea.” Veril timidly answered, “If we use the *Telara* to act as a bridge, our transporters, combined with those of the *Telara*, should be able to cut through the interference.” The young Reman then cautioned, “I don’t think anything like this has ever been done before. I’m not sure it’ll work. We might lose them. But...”

“Time’s running out.” V’lana finished, quickly making her decision. “And a slender chance is better than no chance at all. Do it. Now!”

The Shadow Broker’s Ship—Endgame

“Tell me that you girls are almost done!” Garrus grumbled as he laid out two more charging mercenaries with his pinpoint fire. “I’m running out of charges.”

“Almost there.” Liara replied as a deep voice called out to the asari information broker by name.

“Liara T’Soni!”

“Shadow Broker.” Liara spat out, her voice a mixture of venom and scorn.

“I give you and your friends one chance to surrender. Do so, and you will survive.”

“To be tortured and dissected like Feron?” Liara scoffed. “No thanks.”

“Lieutenant Commander Cilla Oudekirk.” The voice again announced. “There are many who would pay a handsome bounty for a Starfleet officer and what you have in your brain. However, you do not have to be sold at an auction where mercenary gangs, Cerberus, and the batarians will be bidding on you. Instead, you could work for me. I could use your knowledge. Surrender...cooperate willingly...and you will be treated handsomely.”

“He’s not kidding.” Another familiar voice called out, “Do your job and do it well and the Shadow Broker will take care of you. That goes for you too T’Soni...Vakarian. The Shadow Broker wants all three of you alive and working for him. Take it from me...” The voice warned, “It’s a lot better working for him than against him.”

“Tela Vasir.” Liara growled, “Were you there when they tortured Feron?”

“No.” The traitorous Spectre responded, “But he did make the mistake of betraying both the Shadow Broker and our patrons and paid the price for that betrayal.”

“Keep her talking, *lieveling*.” Cilla whispered, “I’m almost done, but there are some weapons calibrations that I need Garrus’s help on.”

A smile coming to his face as he recalled his old teammate, Garrus fondly reminisced, "I told Ashley that all those calibrations I was doing on the old *Normandy* would come in handy one day."

After a momentary pause, the Shadow Broker's voice again rang out. "Garrus Vakarian! There is a sizable reward being offered for your head from the Blue Suns, Eclipse, and Blood Pack. Surrender, enter my employ, and you will enjoy my protection and be well rewarded."

"Right." The asari information broker replied as she and Garrus switched places. Taking a deep breath and exhaling, Liara shouted back, "How do we know you'll keep your word if we surrender?"

"You don't." Tela Vasir replied, "But it's not like you've got a lot of choice in the matter."

"I need another minute." Cilla whispered urgently. "Keep stalling her."

"We're getting impatient T'Soni!" Vasir shouted, "What's your answer?"

"Can we have a minute to talk it over?" Liara pleaded, "Just sixty seconds."

After a momentary pause, the former Spectre responded, "You have thirty seconds."

"All I need." Cilla declared as she and Garrus worked feverishly. Moments later, she whispered, "Done."

"Your answer, T'Soni!" Vasir demanded, "Now!"

Her lips turning up in an evil grin, Liara responded, "Here it is, Vasir."

"What the..."

Cringing at the sound of rocket weapons fire, explosions from rockets and turrets, and the screams of mercenaries, the trio listened in silence as the carnage played out until they heard the Shadow Broker's voice booming throughout the ship. "Ship's systems have been breached. Executing Omega Protocol. Self-destruct engaged. Two minutes and counting."

"Shit!" Garrus cursed as he gazed at the two women standing before him. His lips turning up in a rueful grin, he remarked apologetically, "If I've got to go out, I can't think of two other people I'd rather go out with. When we get to that bar on the other side, first round's on me."

"I'm sorry, *siha*." Liara sobbed as she and her blonde companion embraced, "I wish...I wish..."

"Shhh..." Cilla replied in soft voice as, gently touching Liara's chin, she lifted upwards so that their lips could meet. "We're together now, *lieveling*. That is all that matters." With those final words, the lovely Dutch woman and asari's lips met at the same moment as they felt a tingling feeling.

RRW Gallena

"Ahem..."

Hearing the sound of Garrus clearing his throat, the embracing couple reluctantly broke their lip lock. Her eyes gradually focusing on her surroundings, Liara murmured, "The *Gallena*. We're back...but...how?"

"You can thank our Chief Engineer." Quickly turning to the source of the voice, the asari information broker and her blonde companion quickly blushed deep shades of blue and red. "Tali?"

Chuckling, the young quarian explained, "Veril came up with the idea of using a burst of hyperbarionic energy to cut through the interference and then use the *Telara* as a bridge for your transport. We thought for a moment that we'd lost you, but Veril did some quick adjusting and... here you are. So what exactly happened down there?"

Quickly putting on her normal icy expression, Cilla remained silent, her reply a slight upturn of her lips. Quickly changing the subject, the Dutch tactical officer declared as she handed Tali a padd. "While we were hacking into the Shadow Broker's computer, we managed to download this. We're not sure what's in there so..."

"We'll be careful." Tali replied as she took the padd from the other woman's hands. "You three better get to the bridge. The subcommander's waiting."

"And we all know how she doesn't like to be kept waiting." Garrus quipped as he gestured towards the door, "After you, ladies."

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