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**Mass Effect: The Helldiver Saga, The Beginning**

by [Veyron722skyhook](https://archiveofourown.org/users/Veyron722skyhook)

**Summary**

When Commander Austin Shepard of The Helldivers is assigned to the SSV Normandy he never anticipated becoming humanities first Spectre, discovering an ancient threat to the entire galaxy and even falling in love.

(First appeared on FF.net in 2012)
This was originally a fanfiction.net exclusive that I first started in 2012, but a friend convinced me to post my work here as well.

This saga will cover all three games with some hopefully interesting plot differences. Also this will eventually be Liara/Shepard romance since she's my favourite romance option in the whole trilogy.

I'd like to thank the fabulous StTheo on Deviantart for first inventing the Helldivers with his fantastic art work. I would also like to point out that I got full permission from him to base this story off of his work.

Fair warning. This fic contains language, mild violence and sex in Chapters 1, 6, 11, 17, 20 and 23, so be warned, my work will take full advantage of the Explicit rating.

Hope you enjoy the first chapter. I'll try and keep uploading chapters as soon as possible.

Mass Effect: The Helldiver Saga

Episode 1, The Beginning…

Prologue:

Well, what about this one? A spacer… lived aboard starships most of his life.

Ah yes, I remember him. Military service runs in the family. His mother's a Captain in the navy, his sister an N7 marine and his father's a Helldiver.

So is he apparently.

The Helldivers are well known for getting the job done. Though some see them as violent and unpredictable; some think they butcher the Batarians. That recent mission on Torfan in particular has only enforced those doubts and raised serious questions about them.

But we can't question the fact that they've freed hundreds of human slaves from the Batarians for the past few years.

True. Besides not all them are natural killers, some are more heroic. He for example proved himself during the Blitz, held off enemy forces on the ground until reinforcements arrived. He was also the first human to start off as an Alliance marine and then become a Helldiver back when he joined.

He's the only reason Elysium is still standing.

We can't question his courage.

Humanity needs a hero, and he's the best we've got. And let us not forget the Hellspawn Civil War. He's a veteran of that war who fought on the front lines. Practically a war hero.

But is a Helldiver the kind of person we want protecting the galaxy?
A Helldiver's the only kind of person who can protect the galaxy.

Very well. I'll make the call. Only one thing though, I can't find his name.

His name's Shepard. Commander Austin Shepard.

Chapter 1

Meet Alpha Squad

The planet Maltoor. Not the most pleasant place to visit, especially considering how it now housed a hidden Batarian slaver camp. That was why they were here.

Commander Austin Shepard, stood up from his seat. The rest of his team mates didn't take any notice. They usually waited until he had something important to say to them. As he finished standing up, he picked up his familiar triangular shaped Helldiver helmet from the seat he had been sitting next to. As he placed it on, the familiar temporary darkness of the helmet engulfed him, all he could hear was a small hissing sound as the helmet locked into place and the air intakes activated. Then came the familiar start up sound. A holographic display came to life in the lower region of the helmet, next was the familiar voice of his suit saying "Scanning all systems, please wait." Then the words "Visual feed established" appeared on the screen, along with a perfect video image of what he should be seeing. Another holo display appeared in the top right hand region of his helmet of his entire armour. Certain sections of the armour lit up briefly and then went back to their original colour as the suit scanned everything. Austin didn't mind the short wait. He went through this procedure every time he put his helmet on and the suit came online.

Austin Shepard was a Helldiver, one of the best soldiers in the galaxy. When the Helldivers had first been created by the technologically advanced alien race known as The Arkanes, they had been made for the sole purpose of being the Arkane's military force. However as the years went by, and the Arkanes soon learned that they were not alone in the universe, it had slowly evolved into a multispecies super soldier program.

With his suit scan finished, Austin turned his attention the rest of his squad. They were all sat down, some of them tending to pieces of their own armour; others just sat in silence, and some conversing with one another. There were six of them, all Helldivers just like him, the only difference was that they all had differently shaped armour to him, depending on their race and position on the squad, one thing all their armours had in common though, was the helmet.

Some of the helmets where different sizes depending on how big there face was. But they all had the same triangular shaped design that all Helldivers where required to have. Customization was a welcome addition among Helldivers, they were free to modify their armours with different materials, swap armour parts for different ones, add accessories to their armour for decoration if they wished, and even choose the colours. As far as customization went with Helldivers, they could go all the way if they wanted to. The only rule they had to go by was that all Helldiver's had to have the same Helmet; they could gladly paint the helmet and add accessories to it if they wanted, but it had to be the same triangular design. It had become a familiar symbol for the Helldivers.

Austin hadn't done much to his Helldiver armour, he mostly kept the colours the same. Some additions he had made though were the extra ammo packs strapped to his chest and belt, the N7 logo on his neck guard and the red N7 stripe on his right arm as well. After he'd received these commendments for his work on Elysium he had decided to add it to his armour for all to see rather
than it just seeming like a symbolic gesture, the rest of the team even said it made him look "More commando like". Another noticeable feature he had was the sword and shield on his back. Although Helldiver training included basic fencing and all Helldivers where given the recently invented omni blades, they could choose to develop it further if they wanted to with advanced training. Austin of course had been one of those that had chosen to develop it, although he didn't use the sword and shield much in a gun fight, they did occasionally come in handy. Plus, he insisted on keeping them since they had been a from his mentor. One time he could remember using it in battle was when his omni blade had malfunctioned and he had had to use the sword and shield instead. It had been messy, but nice at least to use them in the field finally. The shield had been a later gift from his mentor. What made the shield special however was that it also had a gun on the inside, enabling it to double as both a shield and a gun. It enabled Austin to use both his sword and a gun simultaneously while also having some protection against melee attacks or incoming fire.

Four of the Helldivers sitting in front of Austin where aliens. A Turian, a Krogan, an Asari and a Quarian. The last two where humans. Together they formed the legendary Alpha squad.

"Alright! Listen up everyone!" Austin said demandingly.

All of Alpha squad immediately stopped what they were doing and directed there attention to their commander.

Having got everyone's attention, Alpha Squad's Commander cleared his throat. "The intel we've received reports a significant enemy presence here. We have the element of surprise, so let's use it. The Batarians can't know we're here."

"Don't worry boss. They won't even know what hit them." Austin looked to the Helldiver that had said that. The man was at the far end of the confined space they were all in. His armour was a traditional navy blue with two white stripes running down his chest, another stripe down each arm and another on his helmet. Unlike Shepard's his armour wasn't as muscular. He had a slimmer build than the others; he needed it after all since he was the team's Scout.

Dashiell Torres had been born on the planet Mindoir. When Batarian slavers attacked the colony there, he had been forced to watch both his parents die. When the Helldivers intervened, Dash had watched everything. That was one of the reasons he had joined the Helldivers once he was old enough.

Austin sighed slightly. "Normally I would encourage that behaviour, Dash. But pay attention, please!" "This is a covert operation, our mission is to locate and evacuate, we engage only if necessary." "We're not at war here."

"Not yet we're not." That came from the Krogan. He was the largest out of all of them. His Helldiver armour was painted a very dark shade of red with white tubes connecting to several different places on his chest, arms, legs and neck. If his height and muscle build alone didn't make him look big then his armour would. All the armour plates on his where massive. In addition, the various ammo canisters he had strapped to the armour gave him a look that definitely said "You don't want to mess with me, Punk" and for the heavy weapons expert that was something he needed.

Urdnot Kraan had started out at first as a merc in the Blood Pack gang, hence why he had coloured his armour in a similar fashion, but had quit when he got bored of not seeing enough action. Left to fend for himself, life had gotten extremely difficult. He had heard about the Helldivers from a friend. When he heard they were recruiting Krogan he decided to take the job since he had nothing else. To his surprise though he found the job even better than mercenary work, the best guns, the best equipment and a definite guarantee of battles.
Upon hearing the Krogan's comment, all eyes turned to him. "Kraan, that's not helpful." Said Shepard. The Krogan, Kraan gave an innocent look "What?"

Before Austin could answer however, the Quarian then spoke up. "Shepard. Do we even know if the Batarians still have them?"

Despite being a Quarian, Leena Vas Penthra was huge. At 5 foot 11, she was already fairly tall. As if that wasn't enough, she had enough muscle on her to put a bodybuilder to shame. Her armour was purple with a few silver patterns here and there. All sorts of various gadget and accessories adorned the armor as well, adding to her already larger than life appearance. A person with no military knowledge only had to take one look at her and they'd be able to tell she was an engineer. Some of the accessories where also souvenirs from when she had originally been on her pilgrimage. After she had returned to the Flotilla, she found life a tiny bit boring since she had found she was more talented in combat engineering rather than typical engineering. When the Arkanes had started recruiting Quarians she had been one of the first to sign up.

"That's what we're here to find out, Leena." Austin replied. "We lost contact with the small human settlement here a week ago when the Batarians invaded. But luckily, our information broker, Xun, managed to intercept a leaked transmission between Batarian slavers, the humans are still alive and being held in a large fortified camp not far from here".

The Turian then spoke "Who's our back up, Shepard?" Unlike the others, the Turian's armour was mostly unchanged parts wise; he preferred to just stick with what he had. The armour's colour however was blue with shades of black, and a Turian symbol on his right shoulder.

Ventra Prarken was the team's sniper expert. He had originally worked on the Citadel, but like many C-sec officers he had felt rather held back by all the regulations and rules. On the plus side though, the training had been good, after all, it had allowed to become a Helldiver quicker than usual.

From behind his mask Shepard smiled slightly "No such thing, Ventra. As of now, we're on our own."

Ventra sat back in his seat and bared a very pleased grin "This is getting better by the minute." He banged fists with Kraan as he finished talking.

Then the Asari spoke up "So let me guess, a one day operation. We pick up their trail, infiltrate the camp deal with the slavers if necessary, grab the hostages and blow the hell out of here before anyone even knows what happened. Correct?"

Despite the fact that she was an Asari commando, her armour wasn't as muscular as some might think. In fact hers looked more light weight. That however was mainly to not tire her out while using her biotics. In addition to this, she had several small canister of red sand strapped to her armour, therefore enabling her biotics to be safely boosted without skin contact. Red sand was toxic after all. Her suit drew the most attention though mainly because she had painted the whole torso area, parts of her legs and arms the exact same colour as her skin, and she had done it so well that some people even believed it to be her actual skin.

It was no secret that Alaara T'Onrak was obsessed with sex. When she had first joined the Helldivers she bedded at least 5 different cadets before completing her training. That had changed though when she had met Sandra Whyte, who was sat right next to her, Sandra had grown attached to the Asari while they had worked together and Alaara had been impressed with Sandra resisting her flirting and advances. Eventually, the two had fallen in love with one another and become bond mates. Despite this though, Alaara still did occasionally flirt with some of the others. Plus it was hard to get her to stop teasing Sandra about how loud she would scream in bed.
Like Austin, Sandra hadn't done much customization with her armour either. One thing she had done though was have her ammo packs and canisters coloured in a desert brown colour. One very noticeable feature though was the small Asari Tattoo on her chest which was designed to resemble her bond mate who was sitting next to her; she had copied this from Alaara who had done the same thing, only her tattoo resembled Sandra.

"Couldn't have put it better myself, Alaara." Replied Austin. He then addressed everyone. "We've never got any hostages killed. I don't expect anything different today. So no heroics, everything by the book. Understood?"

All of Alpha squad replied in union. "Yes sir!"

At the same moment the lights in the drop ship's compartment dimmed and the voice of the pilot sounded over the radio. "Alpha squad, we're approaching the drop zone, stand by for green."

Austin wasted no time. "Alright, everyone gear up. Masks on!"

All of Alpha squad stood up. Those that hadn't been wearing their helmets at first now reached for them and placed them on. All the helmets hissed as they were locked into place.

As they finished, the doors to the drop ship opened, allowing the bright sun of Maltoor to finally spill in, everyone's suit glinted brightly as the light hit them.

"Once we clear the drop ship, form up on me!" Austin shouted over the sound of the engines and rushing wind.

The Hellhound drop ship hovered as it began to descend very slowly. Austin inched out slightly and looked down to the ground, holding on to one of the ceiling bars as he did so. Once the drop ship was low enough for the dive, he gave the order. This was it.

"All jump in 3… 2… 1… NOW!"

All of Alpha squad jumped. The drop was short, they had only been about 60 feet up, Helldiver suits would survive that no problem. They all landed with a loud BANG! and caused small craters upon impact with the ground. Once they had all landed, they slowly stood up from their crouched positions. Shepard lifted his left hand to his helmet and spoke.

"Pilot, we're all clear. We'll radio in once we have the hostages and we're ready for pickup."

There was a quick pause before the pilot replied. "Roger that, Commander Shepard. Good luck."

Once the drop ship had vanished from site, Austin turned back to his squad. "Okay everyone. Move out."

All of Alpha squad unholstered their preferred weapons from their backs. As they did, the weapons folded out until they were properly deployed.

Maltoor was well known for its vast deserts. Despite the hot temperatures and sunlight though, there was always a good chance of their being a small pool of water nearby. It only rained during the night, but when it did, it produced huge amounts. Hence it was capable of sustaining life, and in this case, was an adequate place for a small human settlement. That had all changed however when the slavers arrived. After this, Austin doubted whether any humans might come back here. "But then, I thought that on Torris as well, and look how that turned out. It's always best to look on the bright side." He thought to himself.
After what felt like nearly an hour, Alpha squad soon found what they were looking for, debris from the convoy that had been attacked. After the wreckage had been examined, Ventra reported that he had found the Batarian's trail.

Sure enough, the trail led them to what looked like an abandoned dig site. Now though, it had been transformed into a large Batarian camp.

Austin held his left fist up to indicate the "hold position" gesture to everyone. Everyone immediately obeyed and crouched down. "Hold here until I tell you, I'm going to analyse the camp better, plan out our tactics." Austin activated his tactical cloak and slowly moved in closer.

Tactical cloak was one the Arkane's best inventions. It allowed it's user to stay almost invisible. It had only just been invented though, so it did have some draw backs. For one, fast movements instantly disabled it so Helldivers had to move slowly when using it. This was ideal for Stealth missions though and made it easy to analyse the battlefield very closely without being seen. Another drawback was that the cloak used up a lot of power. When it had first been added to Helldiver suits it originally used the suit's main power cells; however the cloaks high power consumption proved to be a problem. In order to at least correct this issue all Helldiver suits where fitted with another power cell exclusively to power the cloak. Because of this, Helldivers where advised not to use the cloak unless necessary, and for it to be used only for short periods, since the cloaks power cell took at least half an hour to fully recharge.

Austin slowly crept closer to the camp. Taking cover behind a nearby rock, he took a small grenade shaped device from his belt and quietly threw into the camp. "Deploying sensor"

As the device landed, it let out a small pulse. No one could see it, it only showed up on a Helldiver's helmet. Austin watched his HUD light up with several new silhouettes that showed where all the targets where.

"Okay, two Batarians watching from that post, one sentry guard, and another guard for the hostages. This is going to be easy." There were a lot more hostiles, but right now, Alpha squad only needed to worry about the four that Austin had tagged for them. He then gave the form up sign. The rest of the team activated their own cloaks and slowly crept towards there Commander.

"Alright, here's the plan. Leena, Kraan, take out the two in the tower. Ventra, deal with the Sentry and take up Sniping there. Alaara and Sandra, backup. Once you give us the all clear I'll take care of the one guarding the hostages. When he's dead, Dash will get them to a safe distance from the camp. Once he gives us the all clear, we deal with the camp."

Alaara became confused by the last bit "I thought we were assaulting only if necessary?"

"This camp's bigger than I thought it would be, and the Batarians are more organised than usual, and more heavily armed. This may be a main base of operations. If it is, we can't just leave it. Taking it out could gain us an advantage over the slavers." Austin replied.

"Ha! Promotions for everyone!" Kraan quietly laughed.

"Maybe... Maybe. Right, everyone get to it." With that, Leena, Kraan and Ventra slowly separated from the group, still cloaked. "And you two." He indicated to Sandra and Alaara. "I don't want a repeat of last time. At least keep your armour on until we've cleared the camp. If I find you two giving into your... urges again you won't be on the next mission with us." Austin said sternly.

"Not a problem." Said Alaara sarcastically "We can easily just share our little secret with everyone else. Hmmm?" Both the Alaara and Sandra giggled.
Austin didn't press the issue upon hearing that comeback. He knew better than to argue with the couple when they brought up the subject of him sleeping with them both by accident. It hadn't been his fault really; it had happened one night after they'd pulled off one of their most challenging missions yet. He, Sandra and Alaara had celebrated with a few drinks. However Austin and Sandra had probably had a bit too much, as they had ended up in a threesome with Alaara who hadn't been as drunk as the others but had still been pretty tipsy, and horny, enough to first suggest the idea. Austin had been shocked by this, and they all knew that if this did get out it could have a bad impact on his reputation. They had agreed not to speak of it to anyone else. Although the two bond mates would often tease Shepard, while the others weren't around, about the incident when he complained about them sometimes having sex while on a mission.

Austin and Dash both went their ways as well, slowly making their way down toward the tent where the hostages where.

Ventra slowly snuck up on the sentry guard. He was completely oblivious to the fact that a Turian was creeping up on him. Before the guard even had time to react to Ventra's loud breathing, he felt a large pair of hands on his face, the start of the sound of his snapping spine and then, nothing. Ventra gently placed the body on the ground then he unholstered his sniper rifle. "Sentry cleared, Sniper in position" He said into his comm.

Leena and Kraal crept up to the tower. There were two Batarians, both oblivious to the camouflaged Helldivers below them. Kraan spoke "You take that one, I'll take the other." Leena merely nodded. Leena activated her own omni blade, two spike blades, pulsing with electricity, flipped out of her omni tools. It had been quiet enough so that the whole camp didn't hear, but loud enough for the guard above her to look over the edge. "Big mistake" She thought. Leena brought her blade right into the Batarians chest and pulled him out of the tower, at the same time Kraan simply pulled his target out of the tower. "And… snap!" He placed the limp Batarian on the ground then spoke into his com. "Tower clear, Shepard."

"Roger that." Austin replied. "Dash, hold here. I'll take out the guard. Once I give you the all clear, get the hostages out of the camp. When you reach safe distance, let me know, then we'll hit the camp."

Dash merely nodded. Crouched down, Austin slowly made his way down to the tent. Taking cover, he peeked his head around the corner. There was one guard and he had his back to the prisoners. Austin smiled, they never did learn. With his cloak still on, Austin slowly crept up on his target. Very slowly, he withdrew his small combat knife from the holster on his chest. It was too risky to use his omni blade; it had been okay for Leena to use hers since the tower was further away from the camp. Here though, the guard ,and probably a few other Batarians would hear. Austin took a deep breath; he brought his left hand over the guard's mouth. As he did, the fast movements disabled his cloak. Fortunately, all the over guards were out of sight or out of hearing range. As the Batarian struggled, Austin quickly brought his knife into the Batarians heart. The Batarian's struggles stopped.

The prisoners panicked slightly after seeing their guard killed. Austin however made a quick reassuring gesture to them and placed his finger to where his mouth should've been on his mask. "Shhhhhh. It's alright, I'm not gonna hurt you." He whispered calmly. The prisoners quickly calmed down. "Dash, get them out of here." He turned back to the hostages as Dash uncloaked and began leading them out of the tent. "Go with him. He'll get you out of here and to safety." The prisoners slowly stood up and began following Dash out of the camp. One girl though stayed behind briefly. "Thank you." She whispered. Austin merely nodded then the girl joined the others.

Austin then turned to Dash. The two Helldivers nodded to one another before Dash followed the rest of the hostages. Austin meanwhile, re-activated his cloak and took cover behind a small crate. After a
few moments, Dash's voice sounded on the comlink. "Hostages are clear. Give those bastards hell for me!"

"Alright. Hold position and wait for my signal. I've got an idea." Austin said into his comm. With his cloak still on, Austin slowly crept over to a currently parked UT-47 Kodiak Drop Shuttle. Unlike the ones used by the Human Systems Alliance, the shuttle was painted black and red with a Batarian logo. He took another small device from his combat belt and gently threw it at the shuttle. Upon contact, the device attached itself to the shuttle. There was a quiet beep to indicate it was armed.

"Shepard, what are you doing?" Came Ventra's voice through Austin's com.

Austin quickly replied "You know how they say? Start the party… with a bang?"

Without any hesitation, Austin's orange omni tool flashed into life and he armed the detonation device.

The entire shuttle exploded taking five other nearby Batarians with it.

"Show time everyone!" Austin yelled into his comm.

Alarms began to sound throughout the camp. All the other Batarians immediately stopped what they were doing and grabbed their weapons. From his sniper post, Ventra managed to take down at least three Batarians before one of them managed to spot him and fired a rocket at him. It missed him, but his sniper position was completely destroyed. Kraan, Alaara and Sandra moved down from the hill they had been on and into the camp, continuously gunning down any Batarians that tried to get in their way. Alaara was quickly able to knock a few others done with her biotics while Sandra provided cover fire with her Assault Rifle.

Kraan meanwhile was having the time of his life. His large mini gun blasted anything in sight.

Leena had stayed on the high ground with Ventra and had managed to build a twin barrelled sentry turret which was making short work of the camps defence systems.

Austin meanwhile was sticking to cover and firing when seeing an opening. The Batarians where putting up a good fight, but he and his squad mates had faced worse. One of the Batarians had manned a large turret and was making cover a bit difficult for him, he'd be pinned any second, but he wasn't worried. He unclipped a grenade from his belt and threw it at the tent that was set up behind the turret. He knew that grenade wasn't powerful enough to destroy the turret, it was armoured and shielded. Fortunately, the Batarians had been stupid enough to set up the turret right in front of a weapons cache. The whole tent exploded, taking the turret with it and sending the Batarians flying.

Once the rest of the squad had caught up with their commander they moved to the centre building.

"Cover me, I'll handle this." Austin ordered. With that he kicked the door down. "Knock, knock!"

He managed to land a concussive shot on one Batarian, but the other was quicker and he shot his own concussive round. A normal soldier would have blown completely out of the building, for Austin though, his shields absorbed the impact but it still knocked him back a bit, he quickly returned fire and the other slaver fell. Austin noticed movement out of the hole in the building where the other Batarian had been blown out by his concussive round. He saw two other slavers retreating.

"Ventra. We've got two fleeing the scene. Take them out!" He ordered into his comm.

Austin watched as the two Batarians fell from the sniper shots, both their heads exploded. Suddenly he heard a gun click from behind him. Acting immediately on instinct he smashed the butt of his rifle
into the attacker behind him as he whirled around. The attacker was knocked unconscious by the impact. Austin only noticed afterward though that it looked like another colonist. A young woman, she had scars on her face and obvious signs that she'd been abused.

"Oh crap." Austin thought. She clearly hadn't meant him harm, she had probably just been scared when her guards had left her and all noise had been going on. Plus the fact that the safety on the gun was still on enforced that theory.

Leena quickly ran in having heard the noise. She looked down at the unconscious woman then back at Austin.

"I acted on instinct. She snuck up on me from behind. She was probably just scared." He then noticed what looked like an information terminal. "See if you can gain access. Let me know what you find."

"Yes, Commander." Replied Leena. Austin then looked back down at the woman he had just knocked out. "Let me know when she wakes up." Leena merely nodded and started hacking into the console. Austin meanwhile stepped back outside. The rest of Alpha squad were gathering up the bodies of the Batarians. Ventra was observing the other buildings, checking for anything useful. Then Kraan came out of another tent carrying two more bodies over his shoulders. But they weren't Batarians.

"Oh no."

"I'm sorry Shepard. They were dead when I found them. Those bastards must've tortured them to death. Just for fun." He spat on one of the Batarians bodies as he finished talking before heading into another tent.

Austin knelt down in front of one of the bodies. They always seemed to go for the young ones. "Must think they're play things or something. "Sick fuckers!" He thought angrily in his mind. What made it worse was that the other woman had been pregnant. But with her dead there wasn't any way the child could've survived. Both the colonists had clearly died long before they had arrived. But that still didn't make the pain any better. Austin laid his hand on the woman's forehead and bowed his head in silence.

He was then interrupted by a call from Leena. "Shepard! You'll want to take a look at this!"

Austin slowly stood up and walked over to the building he had just come out of. "What've we got?" he asked.

"A damn jackpot! That's what we've got." Leena happily replied. "Slaver contacts, shipping manifests, transmission logs, tactics. This must be our lucky day. Seems you're instincts were right after all."

"When have I ever been wrong?" Austin replied, slightly happier now that he knew that this mission and the loss of the two colonists hadn't been in vain. He smiled under his helmet.

"Well… There was that time Kato…" Leena started sarcastically. But before she could continue, Austin stopped her.

"Whatever." He replied cheerfully. "Copy it all to your omni tool and wipe the local copy." As he finished speaking he heard a groan from behind him. He looked down at the woman he had knocked out earlier, she was coming around. Austin knelt down in front of her and waited for her to fully recover.
"What… Where? What happened?" When her vision cleared she found herself staring directly at Austin. He was close enough, and it was also quiet enough in the building, for her to hear him breathing inside his suit. She was startled at first, but quickly relaxed when she saw the N7 log on his chest.

"Are you alright?" Asked Austin.

"Yes. I'm fine." The woman wearily replied. "Who are you? What happened? Why do I have a headache all of a sudden?"

Austin placed a hand reassuringly on the woman's shoulder. "I'm Commander Austin Shepard of The Helldivers. We just raided this camp to free you and several other hostages from Batarian slavers. You tried to sneak up on me earlier with a gun, I acted on instinct and knocked you out. That's why your head hurts. Sorry about that."

The woman looked at Austin for a few moments. Although the helmet he wore showed no emotion, the tone of his British accented voice was calm and gentle. She rubbed her sore forehead a bit before replying.

"Oh yes. I'm so sorry. I… I was scared. I didn't know you were a Helldiver. I was so frightened, all the noise, the explosions…" She sounded as though she was going to cry, but Austin gently placed his hand on her cheek.

"It's alright. All the Batarians are dead, and we're on your side. You've got nothing to be sorry for."

The woman sniffed a bit and then relaxed. "You're lucky that gun jammed." She said after she'd calmed down. "I could've killed you."

"Trust me, Miss. A shot from that gun wouldn't even have dented this armour. Besides, the gun still had the safety catch on."

"No wonder it just clicked when I tried to fire it."

"What's your name?" Austin asked.

"My name's Lilith. I was a simple farmer here before those slavers took us."

"Why weren't you with the others?"

"They thought they'd try and have fun with me. One of those fucks tried to rape me. They hit me for trying to resist." Lilith indicated her black eye. Then her face suddenly took on a worried expression "What happened to the others?"

"It's okay, there safe. We got them out of the camp first before we attacked. I'm afraid two of them are dead. They were tortured to death." Austin replied sadly.

Lilith sighed. "At least you came now rather than later. We might all be dead now if you hadn't come."

"True." Replied Austin.

Even though Austin's face was covered, Lilith could tell he was smiling again. Austin then stood up and offered Lilith his hand.

"Can you walk?"
"Yes I think so. I just feel a bit dizzy." Lilith took Austin's hand and allowed him to help her up.

"Try and sit down for now." Austin said calmly. "We'll be pulling out soon." Lilith merely nodded and went to sit on a nearby chair.

Austin walked back outside. All the Batarian bodies had been gathered now in a pile.

"Shepard, what do you want done with these two?" Ventra indicated the two dead colonists.

"Put them in stretchers we'll let the other colonists decide what to do with them after that."

Ventra nodded.

Austin looked around. There were only three of them outside.

"Where are Sandra and Alaara?" He asked. Both the other two Helldivers looked around. Nothing. Austin sighed. He knew where they were. "Well at least they doing it now rather than earlier." He thought.

"Don't worry, I'll get them." He said, and walked over to a nearby shelter. Sure enough he found what he was looking for. Sandra had Alaara pinned against the shelter and was furiously kissing her. Portions of their armour lay scattered on the ground and they had both removed the upper regions of the suit mesh. They both felt each other's breasts as they continued making out with one another. Alaara had managed to get more off than Sandra since Sandra had her right hand down Alaara's panties and was furiously fingering her pussy.

"Oh yes! Yes! Rub me their! Oh Goddess, Sandra you're so good, don't stop!" Alaara moaned into Sandra's kiss.

A small puddle had formed on the ground where Alaara was standing. The two both moaned rather loudly as they continued to fuck each other furiously.

"You like me fucking your pussy don't you, you dirty Asari?" Sandra moaned in Alaara's kiss.

Austin sighed again but also laughed at the same time. Although he did find it embarrassing that the two had sex while on a mission, it was quite funny and surprising that they didn't mind doing it in front of everyone else. Although since all of the squad was aware of their relationship that probably had something to do with it.

"Hey girls, I hate to break things up, but we're heading out soon."

The human and Asari turned to Austin. They weren't shocked to be caught in the act. This hadn't been the first time their Commander had caught them half naked.

"You could join us Shepard." Sandra giggled.

"You know what I said last time." Austin replied. "It felt wrong the first time, its not gonna be any different now."

The two bond mates laughed. "Shepard, you really have got to get a girlfriend again. Besides, we both know about your fascination with my people." Alaara giggled.

Austin remained quiet for a few minutes.

"I expect you both back with the others with all your armour on by the time we leave. Am I clear?"
He asked sternly.

"You're not gonna try and stop us? Oh Goddess! That's the spot love!" Alaara replied.

"You at least listened to my previous order about saving it until the end. Better now than earlier. Keep going by all means. Just be back before we head out." And with that, Austin left the couple to continue the wild sex while he walked back to the centre of the camp.

The two dead colonists had now been put on stretchers and cleaned up. Lilith was knelt in front of the pregnant woman. Her face was streaked with tears.

Austin noticed her sad expression; he walked up to her and knelt down beside her. He put his arm on her shoulder. "Friend of yours?" He asked.

"Friend of friend." Lilith replied shakily, trying to hold back her crying. "She was only a month pregnant."

"I'm sorry. Truly I am." Austin said. As he stood up Lilith spoke again.

"Does it hurt, Commander?" Lilith asked "Knowing that despite all you do… You can't save everyone."

"Yes, Lilith." Austin replied. "It does. More than you know. As Commander, it's my job to prevent this. I do all I can, but… the galaxy just isn't kind enough sometimes."

Austin decided to leave Lilith alone for now and walked over to the pile of Batarian bodies. "Clear the area; leave no traces that we were here." He ordered to his squad.

Ventra nodded and walked off to take care of the footprints they had left. Kraan took a small blue glowing capsule from his belt and poured a small quantity onto the pile of bodies. As the blue liquid made contact with the bodies they began to slowly dissolve. Unlike acid, the special substance that they were using was designed to not leave any residue or scorching, or even signs that the body had been melted.

Once the last of the bodies had been dissolved, Alaara and Sandra both returned. Leena soon followed as she appeared out of the main building. "All data wiped, Shepard. Ready when you are."

Austin nodded. They were pretty much ready to leave now.

"Dash, this is, Shepard. Do you copy?" Austin asked into his com.

"Copy Commander." Came Dash's voice.

"Send us your coordinates. We'll rendezvous with drop ship there.

"Aye aye, Commander. See you there."

Austin then turned to the two stretchers. "You two, carry that one." He indicated the stretcher to Alaara and Sandra. "Kraan, Ventra, that one."

The four Helldivers picked up the stretchers and began carrying them out of the camp. Austin then followed with Leena and Lilith both in tow. With the camp cleared of any evidence of their presence, Alpha squad began their journey to the landing zone, and their way off of Maltoor.

Pretty soon they had re-joined with Dash and the other colonists, they were overjoyed to see Lilith but at the same time heart broken by their losses. Austin then radioed the pilot for him to pick them
up. After a short wait, the Drop ship reappeared above them. This time, it landed so that everyone could get in. As the drop ship began ascending, Austin took one last look at the vast desert of Maltoor before the doors closed and the last bits of sunlight disappeared.

Well there we go. The first chapter.

Like to also point out that further details on the Helldivers and Shepard's background will be expanded on in the next few chapters, this one is mostly here in order to introduce all the readers to the Helldivers, Alpha squad (who will play a larger role in future stories) and Shepard in general.

For anyone still unclear on what Shepard and the Helldivers in general look like, do this:

Go to Deviantart

Search for StTheo

One of his works is called Commander Shepard. That's the Shepard i'm using in this series. His actual facial appearance will be in the next chapter.

There are also some other Helldiver pics I intend to feature in this story. Rest assured I got his permission to write this story and I take no credit for the idea in the first place. He deserves it not me.

If you have anything to say about this please do leave a review. At the moment I'm more than welcome to feedback.
Chapter 2, The SSV Normandy

Okay. Chapter 2. This one will now cross into the Mass Effect game and should also introduce Shepard a bit more, and also explain the Arkanes better (In case anyone didn't notice the name is small reference to Dragon Age Origins)

Chapter 2

The SSV Normandy

Alpha squad slowly exited the shuttle. It was good to finally be back home on the planet Arkadia, home of the Arkanes and The Helldivers. The colonists they’d brought back had been sent to the med bay to be checked on; the other two dead colonists had been left with them.

Arkane architecture always did seem fascinating, it was no wonder that a lot of people thought that the Arkanes were related to The Protheans. The docking bays as usual were always busy with either Engineers rushing to posts to fix something, other Helldivers heading to shuttles to embark on their next mission, freed hostages being sent home. It never was quiet.

There were plenty of ships currently in dock as well, some either being repaired from battle, others still under construction or some just here for refuelling. Normally, Alpha squad would come through here and then be called to the Arkane council for their next mission, but not this time. They were all on leave for the next few weeks having pulled off their mission on Maltoor. However they were more enthusiastic than usual since it was an extended leave. They had already been promised leave after the mission, but since they had managed to rescue the colonists and bring back a huge amount of intel on the Batarians’ operations, slaving trades and all sorts of info that would give them an edge over the slavers, the Arkane council had decided to reward them all with extended leave which Austin had been very grateful for. It had been at least 7 weeks since Alpha squad had been on break. It had been non-stop missions and travelling all over the galaxy so there had been little time for rest, now though they’d be able to spend the next 2 weeks or so getting their strength back and probably find some things to take their mind off military work for a change.

As the squad finished making their way through security customs, a finely dressed purple Asari walked up to them.

"Oranna! I didn't expect to see you here." said Austin.

Oranna T'raas wasn't a Helldiver. She served as an assistant to the Chinese information broker, Zhi Shang Ren, or Xun as she was referred to. Xun served as information broker to The Helldivers, she had originally started off as a simple information broker with few contacts and sources just trying to make her way in the galaxy. That had changed though when she had come across some information involving the Batarian slave trade and also one of their attack plans for a critically important Helldiver base. She had originally planned to sell it to the Batarians since they would pay more. But when she found out that the slave trade involved humans, she immediately changed her mind and handed it over to the Helldivers instead. After that she became a very popular source of contact for both The Helldivers and the Arkane council. Eventually this partnership came to the point where the council decided to appoint Zhi as their own personal information broker who would serve as their ultimate source of information. She accepted the position and was given her own specially designed Helldiver armour. In order to be better identified, she also took up the alias Xun, which was the Chinese word for information. Since then her information network had grown so large she was
regarded as the second most powerful broker in the galaxy, next to the mysterious Shadow Broker. She often served as a good friend as Alpha squad as well. She had provided a lot of Intel that had allowed them to take back many human colonies from the Batarians by feeding them leaked transmissions, tech specs and battle tactics. She had even accompanied them on a few missions during which she'd formed a close bond with them all. She'd even convinced the council a few times to give them extra leave. This time though, she hadn't had anything to do with this extended leave, it had all been the council.

Oranna smiled at Austin's greeting. "Welcome home, Commander Shepard. I heard about Maltoor. Congratulations. Xun sends her regards; she says it may take her a whole two weeks to go through all of the Intel you collected. But anyway, I've been sent to tell you that the Arkane council wants to see you."

Kraan grumbled. "What do they want now? We're supposed to be on leave for the next few weeks."

"Not all of you. Just the Commander." Oranna replied.

Austin was surprised by this. "Sound's important if they just want to see me." He turned to the rest of his team. "You guys go and get some rest, you've earned it. I'll be along once I've seen what the council wants."

The rest of Alpha squad separated leaving Shepard with Oranna. "Will that be all, Commander? Or would you like some company?" She asked.

"Actually, I am feeling rather tired." Austin replied "Could you lead me there please?"

"Of course, Commander. Follow me."

The walk to the council chambers was a bit longer than Austin remembered. Finally, they reached the council chambers. "Are you coming in?" Austin asked. Oranna nodded. "I'm needed in there anyway. My mistress needs me."

Austin nodded and the human and asari proceeded into the council chambers. As usual it was abuzz with activity. There where loads of different desks with Helldivers standing in front of them being debriefed for their missions. Several large monitors also adorned the walls; they were showing different news reports and footage from current warzones.

In the centre of the room was a massive galaxy map. It showed where certain fleets or enemy ships where currently known. It also neatly divided the systems up. The Attican Traverse where a small battle for one whole planet was currently going on, both inner and outer Council space which had a small fleet stationed near some far off human colonies in case of attack, the earth systems alliance space currently had no fleets in the area. Not that they needed to be anyway, the Alliance fleets looked after the colonies there. Then lastly the Terminus Systems which was currently stretching most of the fleets rather thin since much Batarian territory was there.

Austin looked at the map. "No significant changes." He sighed. "Sometimes I do wonder how long it will be before this all turns into a massive full scale war."

Oranna looked at him. Austin looked back.

"I know." He said. "I shouldn't think like that. It's just difficult sometimes to look on the bright side of life and stay focused when you've spent most of your life fighting for the greater good and yet after at least a decade, the tide just doesn't seem to turn."

Oranna hesitated. "What do you fight for, Commander? There must be something that drives you to
keep fighting, even when the results aren't what you want."

Austin sighed again, very deeply this time. "When I first joined, it was originally for many reasons. But they've changed since then. Now the only thing that comes to my mind is…"

He hesitated and didn't reply for several seconds.

"Yes?" Oranna asked.

"I don't know. I guess I'm just not the young man I once was."

"There must be something. Friends? Family?... A lover?"

Austin stopped.

"I only wish I could say yes. True my family offer some encouragement and Alpha squad are like true friends. But I just feel as though I lack something, something really worth fighting for, something even worth dying for."

"You didn't mention a lover…" Oranna suggested.

Austin turned his head in her direction. "Once. But it didn't work out"

Before Oranna could press the issue further a neatly dressed committee member walked up to them.

"Commander Shepard. Welcome back sir." She saluted as he spoke.

"At ease." Austin replied. The officer's stance returned to normal.

"The Arkane council is ready to see you."

Austin nodded and turned to Oranna. "Thank you for walking with me. I enjoy the occasional company."

"Any time, Commander. If you'll excuse me, I must tend to my mistress." With that Oranna saluted and disappeared into the crowd.

Austin turned back to the committee member and nodded. She proceeded, he followed.

The Arkane council chambers were one of the finest sites to behold. More than just meetings went on in here. There'd been many other events that occurred in this room. Promotions, announcements, anything the council had to say, was said in here. In front of the large circular base that the council would look down on, there were six large columns, all of which were where a council member would sit. Behind all of this was a massive towering statue of the Arkane's greatest creation, a Helldiver. This particular one however was an Arkane Helldiver since the Arkanes had been the first Helldivers before they started accepting other races into their ranks. The armour was a completely different design to a human Helldiver since the Arkanes had different body structures to humans. One similarity the statue did have however that all helldivers had in common was the Helldivers triangular shaped helmet. As Austin made his way in, the council members took their seats.

Unlike many species in the galaxy, the Arkanes where considered a strange looking one. They were humanoid in appearance like all other races but the similarities ended there. The first thing that someone would notice about them was that they were clearly insect like. Their faces in particular clearly had the look of a Mantis. Some differences though where the lack of antenna that earthen mantis had, a more human like mouth and small plates of organic armour on certain parts of their
heads and bodies. Their voices always reminded Austin of insects due to their unusual speech patterns.

Austin made his way to the centre of the circular base and saluted.

"Commander Shepard." The lead Arkane councillor loudly spoke.

"Councillors." Austin replied.

"You may stand at ease Commander."

Austin relaxed and returned to the usual stance he took when addressing the council.

"Firstly, we would like to congratulate you and your team for their success on Maltoo. Xun has already begun analysing the data, she tells us it could take weeks at least to analyse all of it. You have done us proud, Commander. The Intel that we gain from this may help to tip the balance of this war in our favour. And many more slaves will be freed by this."

Some of the Arkanes stood up and clapped. Once they had finished they were seated again.

"However that is only partly why you are here. No doubt you are probably wondering why you have been summoned here alone for a simple congratulation, Commander?" Spoke another councillor, this time a female one. Unlike the males, female Arkanes had smaller plates but compensated for this by having a lighter bone structure, therefore allowing them faster movements.

"I am… curious, councillors." Austin replied.

"The human systems alliance has recently finished construction on a new star ship. From what we have read, this ship is the Alliance's attempt at improving relationships with the Turians by co designing this ship. They call it, The SSV Normandy. This ship is due for a shakedown to test its unique stealth drive system, and to also analyse how it will truly perform on active duty. From what we are told, the Normandy will be commanded by Captain David Anderson. We believe that you are familiar with him."

Austin was temporarily taken back by the mention of his former Alliance lieutenant. "That is correct, councillor. Back when I first joined the Alliance military, David Anderson was the lieutenant in charge of my unit. I have also met the captain numerous times during my missions with Alpha squad."

"I see. Would that be the unit you sadly lost on Akuse? The unit that you tend to say is what inspired you to truly show the talents you have that we observed, and so decided to accept you into our ranks?"

Austin immediately fell silent. He hadn't thought about that day for a whole decade. He had lost a lot of team mates that day. It was painful to be reminded of that loss again. He hesitated for a moment before clearing his throat and regaining his composure.

"Yes… councillors."

Some of the council members murmured to one another. Austin couldn't really tell what they were saying but he picked one voice saying "That raises questions about the Captain's ability to Command." Finally the murmur died down and the lead council member spoke again.

"Interesting. But anyway, the Normandy is due for its field test in two days. That is where you come in."
"Me?"

"You are being temporarily reassigned to Captain Anderson's command; you will accompany this mission along with a Turian spectre representing the Citadel council who funded the Normandy's construction in the first place."

"Permission to speak freely, sir?"

"If you wish."

"Why send a Helldiver? Let alone me. From what you said we didn't help build this… Normandy."

"Actually, Commander, we did. We contributed in our small way by donating some of our finest engineers and a few resources to its construction. But the Alliance seems to want the Turians to take all the credit it seems."

"So you wish me to merely observe and be sure that our investment is being used appropriately?"

"Indeed. We would hate for the Alliance to not fully comprehend how to use some of our best resources."

"But why me personally? Surely this is something better suited for a cadet in training."

"You are one of our best, and most respected, soldiers, Commander. Plus, the Alliance felt we should send someone who has familiarities with some of the crew. Given how some of the Alliance do not fully trust the Helldivers, or us, improving relations would be vital. Plus we are well aware of your talent in socialising with others."

"I understand. What about the rest of my squad? They were promised extra leave for their work on Maltoor." Austin asked.

"The rest of Alpha squad will remain here to spend their leave. Once this little assignment of yours has been completed, you will re-join with them."

Austin bowed his head to the council. "Thank you, councillors. They have fought long and hard for many weeks to gain this victory. They deserve some time to rest and recover."

"You are due to join the Normandy's crew tomorrow before they leave gate the next day."

"As you wish, councillors."

"This meeting is concluded. Good luck, Commander Shepard. All our thoughts are with you."

Austin saluted to the council and walked off while the Arkane council disbanded.

"They're doing what!" shouted an alarmed Kraan.

"I'm being temporarily reassigned to an Alliance ship. Apparently it's to improve relations. I know, odd isn't it?" Austin replied.

All of Alpha Squad where gathered in their own special barracks. They had been given them separate from the others as a reward for their constant mission successes. Everyone except for Austin had removed their Helldiver armour and had changed into their off duty clothes.

"But you'll miss leave with us! We had a special surprise planned for you. Now you'll miss it." said
Alaara, who was trying to keep her eyes off of Sandra who was currently removing her clothes in the other room.

"Look guys. I'm only gonna be gone for a few days. I'll be back before you know it." Austin said as he was packing some of his belongings into a small backpack.

"I still think it's a bit unfair, Shepard. They could've at least told you about this before we arranged the time for our leave." said Dash, who was now in his casual off duty clothes and was now stood in front of a mirror, sorting his hair style out.

"Guys, I'm just as disappointed about this as you all are, but I have my orders."

"So what about us? Are we getting temporarily reassigned to a new Commander until you come back? Will we have to forestall our leave as well? Oh Come on, you stupid bosh'tet!" Leena responded annoyingly as she continued to fiddle with a contraption she was currently working on.

"No. Don't worry guys. The council is letting you enjoy your leave. Once I'm done out there I'll return home and we can all enjoy a nice long shore leave together. It'll be like Traask all over again."

"Yes, but you were only gone that time because it was a family matter. That we can understand, but this time you're being sent on another mission." said Ventra.

"Alright. I'm not arguing with you anymore over this. Just accept it and get some rest. You've all earned it." said Austin as he finished packing the bag and slung it over his left shoulder.

"So do you, Shepard." said Sandra as she emerged from the other room in only some trousers, and her bra. Alaara licked her lips slightly when she saw her bond mate without her shirt.

"I'll be back soon. Just do me a favour and stay out of trouble." Austin said as he approached the door.

"Don't worry, Commander. We can stay out of trouble better than you think." said Alaara as she winked at Sandra. "Oh and keep your eyes peeled. You never know, you might meet a hot Alliance girl."

Austin chuckled. "If I do, you'll be the first to know." And with that, he disappeared out of the door, leaving the rest of Alpha squad to enjoy the start of their leave.

There was a small bump as the drop ship docked in place. Austin stood up and waited for the door to open. Once it did, he stepped out onto the platform. "Okay… Now which docking bay am I looking for?" He thought to himself. He walked up to one of the docking administrators.

"Good day, Commander." said the Asari.

"You know who I am?" Austin replied.

"Yes. I log all arrivals. It's my job to know who we get here. How may I help you?" She said.

"Can you tell me where the SSV Normandy is?" Austin asked.

"Ah yes. Docking bay D94, I believe they're expecting you. Do you need assistance finding the dock?" Replied the Asari.

"I'll handle it. Thank you for the help." Austin replied.
"Have a pleasant day, Commander." Said the Asari as Austin walked off into the nearest elevator.

The elevator ride was long, but the view that it provided was very spectacular. The whole space port was a complete buzz with starships and frigates. Then he spotted it, the SSV Normandy. True to the reports that he had read, the ship was quite a sight to behold. It definitely had the look about it that incorporated both Alliance and Turian ship designs.

Finally, the elevator stopped and the doors opened. Austin stepped out and moved to the window to get a closer look at the ship. What he didn't count on was a familiar face spotting him.

"Commander Austin Shepard. What a surprise."

Austin immediately turned to the woman who had mentioned his name. Right in front of him stood an old friend of his, Doctor Karin Chakwas.

"Karin? My god, I didn't expect to see you here. How've you been? It's been too long."

The two old friends walked up to each other and shook hands.

"I'm good. You don't look too bad yourself, Shepard." said the doctor.

"Karin, how many years is it going to take before you start using my first name? We're friends aren't we?" Austin replied.

"I guess I just got too used to calling you that, Commander."

Austin sighed, but it was a happy sigh. "Even when not on duty you still insist on being so formal. Six years since we last met and you haven't changed one bit."

The two friends chuckled.

"So, which ship are you currently serving on?" Austin asked.

Dr Chakwas pointed to the Normandy. "That one."

"Really? What a coincidence. I'm being assigned to that as well." said Austin.

Dr Chakwas looked surprised. "You? Why?"

"Apparently, since the Arkane council made their own small contribution to the design of this ship, they want me to accompany the Normandy for its first shakedown run." Austin replied.

Then another very familiar voice came from behind Austin.

"Commander! Good to see you've made it."

Austin turned around and found himself facing his old lieutenant, David Anderson. He saluted, but the captain quickly waved it off.

"Good to see you too, Anderson. It's been a long time. Sounds like your military career has worked out for you."

"There've been some rough spots, but it's good to see a familiar face." Said Anderson as he extended his hand, Austin shook it.
"The Arcturus Prime relay's in range. Initiating transmission sequence."

The sound of the pilot's voice echoed throughout the Normandy's main deck as Austin proceeded to the bridge.

"We are connected. Calculating transit mass and destination."

As Austin stepped into the CIC he passed Dr Chakwas. She merely nodded to him.

"The relay is hot. Acquiring approach vector. All stations secure for transit."

Around him, Austin could see many different Alliance soldiers, all busy with something. He hadn't realised that a ship this small needed so many people. Finally, Austin made it to the bridge. Also standing there observing the Normandy's pilot was the Turian spectre he had been told about, Nihilus Kryik. He was wearing traditional dark Turian armour with red paintings in certain places. He also had white face markings that really stood out from his dark skin. Out of the windows, Austin could see the massive Mass Relay ahead which they were about to use to travel to the system which contained the planet that the Normandy would then be docking at, Eden Prime.

"Board is green. Approach run has begun. Hitting the relay in 3… 2… 1…"

The Normandy was engulfed in blue energy and then there was a small jolt as the ship was catapulted instantly by the Mass Relay into another star cluster. Once the jump had been completed, the Normandy's pilot, Flight lieutenant Jeff "Joker" Moreau, spoke again, his voice echoed throughout the ship.

"Thrusters, check. Navigation, check. Internal emission sync engaged. All systems online. Drift… just under fifteen hundred K."

"Fifteen hundred is good. Your Captain will be pleased." said Nihilus before he left the bridge.

Joker turned to the over Alliance officer who was currently sitting in the co-pilot's chair next to him, Lieutenant Kaiden Alenko. "I hate that guy."

"Nihilus gave you a compliment. So you hate him?" Kaiden responded.

Austin moved a bit closer to hear what they were saying; he could tell they were a bit uneasy.

"You remember to zip up your jumpsuit on the way out of the bathroom? That's good. I just jumped us halfway across the galaxy and hit a target the size of a pinhead, so that's incredible. Besides spectres are trouble, I don't like having them on board. Call me paranoid."

Kaiden quickly responded. "You're paranoid. The Citadel council helped fund this project. They have a right to send someone to keep an eye on their investment."

"Yeah, that is the official story. But only an idiot believes the official story." Joker responded back. "And then there's that Helldiver guy. Whatever his name is."

"Joker, he's standing right behind you." Kaiden said worryingly.

"Relax, Kaiden. He can't hear us with his head in that bucket. Don't get me wrong though, that whole suit is very badass and really cool looking and I'll bet some of the ladies think it's very large in all the right places."

Joker of course had been wrong. Austin could hear him with his helmet on and he had just listened to
the whole conversation. Much as he understood the crew being nervous about his presence like this, he didn't liek them talking about him behind his back.

"Actually I can hear you." he said.

Joker immediately froze and turned to the Helldiver. "Er… Well I didn't… I mean I wasn't… Sorry, Commander." He stuttered. Kaiden couldn't help but snigger at his reaction.

"Still, you've got to admit, Kaidan, something doesn't feel right. If this is a simple shakedown run then why have a Spectre here, let alone a Helldiver?" Joker asked, quickly changing the subject.

"I'm standing right here!" Austin said, this time more irritated.

Before this could continue any further however, they were interrupted by Captain Anderson over the comm channel.

"Joker. Status report."

"Just cleared the mass relay, Captain." Joker replied. "Stealth systems engaged. Everything looks solid."

"Good. Find a comm buoy and link us into the network. I want mission reports relayed back to Alliance brass before we reach Eden Prime." Anderson responded.

"Aye, aye, Captain." Said Joker. "Better brace yourself sir, I think Nihilus is heading your way."

"He's already here, lieutenant." Replied Anderson. "Tell Commander Shepard to meet me in the comm room for a debriefing." With that the comm channel cut out.

"You get that, Commander?" Joker asked.

"Great. You pissed the Captain off, now I'm gonna pay for it." Austin said irritably as he turned around and exited the bridge.

"What did I do?! The Captain's always in a bad mood!" Joker objected.

"Only when he's talking to you, Joker." Kaiden added.

Despite that Austin could tell everyone was a bit unsettled by his presence, he knew there was little he could do about it. It was against protocol for a Helldiver to remove their helmet without good reason. And anyway, he didn't want to attract unnecessary attention. Most of the crew didn't even know who he was either, and it was probably best to keep it that way. To some Alliance personal, he was a decorated war hero. Though it was to be recognized for what he'd done, he was too modest half the time. Half the time he got a bit tired of the attention some people gave him. A lot of the time he felt like they were making too much fuss over it. As he often said, he was just doing his job.

Despite being ordered to the comm room, he didn't feel in a rush, and admittedly he was somewhat fascinated by this ship.

The small hallway leading to the CIC had several other officers tapping away at their holographic interfaces. The main CIC also had something Austin hadn't noticed before, a galaxy map. It was different from the one back at home though; theirs was more designed as a war map. This one was merely designed for navigation and exploration. One of the officers was talking into the comm on his desk.
"I'm telling you, I just saw him! He marched by like he was on a mission." said the officer. From the number of gold shoulder lines, Austin guessed he was the ships XO.

"He's a spectre. They're always on a mission." came the voice from the comm.

"And we're getting dragged right along with him!" said the officer.

"Relax, Pressly. You're going to give yourself an ulcer." The comm then ended.

As Austin continued to the comm room he spotted Dr Chakwas talking to an Alliance soldier. The soldier was talking about how he grew up on Eden Prime and that it was not the kind of place Spectres visited. The Dr seemed to disagree. Austin approached the two.

"Good to see you again, Commander." Dr Chakwas greeted him.

"You as well, Doc." Austin replied.

"You know the commander? How come you know a Helldiver?" Asked the marine.

"During one of my medical studies I was posted on Arkadia. At the time, the Helldivers needed all the medics they could find. I accompanied the Commander and his squad a few times on missions before I was called back."

"Are you going to introduce us, Karin?" Asked Austin.

"Indeed. Commander Shepard this is Corporal Richard L. Jenkins. Corporal, this Commander Austin Shepard."

"The Commander Shepard? The hero of Elysium and the first Alliance marine to become a Helldiver? Sir, it is a real honour." Jenkins saluted as he spoke.

"I hadn't realised I was this well known." said Austin, trying his best to hide a bored sigh.

"What do you think, Commander? We won't be staying on Eden Prime too long, will we? I'm itching for some real action!" said Jenkins.

"I sincerely hope you're kidding, Corporal. Your "real action" usually ends with me patching up crew members in the infirmary." Dr Chakwas interjected.

"You need to calm down, Corporal. A good soldier stays cool, even under fire." said Austin.

"Sorry, Commander, but this waiting's killing me. I've never been on a mission like this before. Not one with a Spectre and a Helldiver on board!" Jenkins replied.

"Just treat this like every other assignment you've had and everything will work out." said Austin, still trying to calm Jenkins down.

"Easy for you to say. The Helldivers earned their reputation on Torfan and you in particular proved yourself during the Blitz and the Hellspawn Civil War. Everybody knows what you can do. This is my big chance. I need to show the brass what I can do!" Jenkins replied.

"You're young, Corporal. You have a long career ahead of you. Don't do something stupid to mess it up." said Austin, a bit more forcefully this time. Jenkins seemed to calm down a bit after that.

"Don't worry, sir. I'm not going to screw this up." He replied.
"I should go. The Captain's waiting for me." said Shepard.


When he entered the comm room he only saw Nihilus, who then turned once Austin had approached him.

"Commander Shepard. I was hoping you'd get here first. It will give us a chance to talk." He said.

Austin looked around a bit before he replied. "The Captain said he'd meet me here."

"He's on his way." Nihilus replied. "I'm interested in this world we're going to – Eden Prime. I've heard it's quite beautiful."

"I'm afraid I wouldn't really know. I've never been there." Austin simply replied.

"But you know of it." Said Nihilus. "Eden Prime has become something of a symbol for your people hasn't it? Proof that humanity can not only establish colonies across the galaxy, but also protect them. But how safe is it really?"

"If you have something to say, just say it. I don't play well at twenty questions." Said Austin, trying to not sound too intimidating.

"Your people are still newcomers, Shepard. The galaxy can be a very dangerous place. Is the Alliance truly ready for this?"

"Ready for what? What do you mean?" Austin asked.

Before Nihilus could answer however, the doors opened and Captain Anderson stepped in.

"I think it's about time we told the Commander what's really going on." He said to Nihilus.

Nihilus turned back to Austin. This time he looked more serious than he had done.

"This mission is far more than a simple shakedown run." He said.

"I see." Austin simply said.

In this case, it felt to pretend that he hadn't been suspicious.

"We're making a covert pick-up on Eden Prime. That's why we needed the stealth systems operational." Anderson replied.

"There must be a reason I, and the Arkane council weren't told about this, sir." Said Austin, a hint of accusation in his voice.

"This comes down from the top, Commander." Anderson replied forcefully. "Information strictly on a need-to-know basis. A research team on Eden Prime unearthed some kind of beacon during an excavation. It was Prothean. This is big, Shepard. The last time humanity made a discovery like this, it jumped our technology forward two hundred years. But Eden Prime doesn't have the facilities to handle something like this. We need to bring the beacon back to the Citadel for proper study."

"Obviously, this goes beyond mere human interests, Commander. This discovery could affect every species in Council Space. But the beacon's not the only reason I'm here." Said Nihilus.

"Nihilus wants to see you in action, Commander. He's here to evaluate you." Said Anderson.
"Excuse me?" Austin asked, clearly confused now.

"The Alliance has been pushing for this for a long time. Humanity wants a larger role in shaping interstellar policy. We want more say with the Citadel Council. The spectres represent the council's power and authority. If they accept a human into their ranks, it shows how far the Alliance has come." Anderson replied.

"Even without your service record, there's no doubt that the Helldivers are the finest soldiers in the galaxy. Torfan in particular shows what they are capable of. A brutal outcome true, but they got the job done. You however are different. You held off an enemy assault during the Blitz single-handed. You showed not only courage, but also incredible skill. Add to that, you fought in the Hellspawn civil war. So you have not just skill, but also experience. That's why I put your name forward as a candidate for the Spectres." Said Nihilus.

"Why would a Turian want a human in the Spectres? Let alone a Helldiver. Last I checked, we weren't on good terms with each other." Austin asked.

"Not all Turians resent humanity. Some of us see the potential of your species. We see what you have to offer to the rest of the galaxy… and to the Spectres. We are an elite group. It's rare to find an individual with the skills we seek. I don't care that you're human, or a Helldiver, Shepard. I only care that you can get the job done." Nihilus replied.

"I see." Austin replied coldly. He didn't like the sound of this. He was also annoyed that the Alliance had lied to the Arkane council about this. There was no way that the Arkanes would've withheld this information from him. Clearly the Alliance were being a bit possessive over him. "So what happens now?"

"I need to see your skills for myself, Commander. Eden Prime will be the first of several missions together." Nihilus responded.

"You'll be in charge of the ground team. Secure the beacon and get it onto the ship ASAP. Nihilus will accompany you to observe the mission." said Anderson.

"Understood." Austin simply replied reluctantly.

"We should be getting close to Eden—"

But before Anderson could finish he was interrupted by Joker's voice over the radio.

"Captain! We've got a problem."

"What's wrong, Joker?"

"Transmission from Eden Prime, sir. You better see this!"

"Bring it up on screen."

The transmission came to life on the screen. The screen was instantly lit up with gunfire and explosions everywhere. Alliance soldiers where constantly firing to an off-screen enemy. One female soldier ran up to the camera man and pushed him to the ground, ordering him to get down as she did it. As the transmission continued, another soldier attempted to explain the situation and request for help, but he was killed before he could finish. Then an odd noise that sounded like a jamming signal of sorts sounded off. The camera panned round to show the alarmed faces of several soldiers as they stared up into the sky. The camera then turned round again to show what looked like a ship descending from the sky, but it looked absolutely massive, plus it was descending like a huge clawed
hand was ready to grab something. Suddenly the whole ground began to rumble violently throwing several Alliance soldiers off their feet and forcing others soldiers to try and keep their balance. The female soldier that had spoken earlier suddenly shouted "Behind you!" the camera attempted to look but it shaking too violently to show what was attacking them. All they could see was what looked like a huge explosion of rocks and dirt and the faintest traces of some sort of towering figure, as though something had burst out of the ground. All that could be heard now was the shouts, screams and cries of pain as every Alliance soldier was killed. The female soldier shouted fall back and most of the soldiers tried too. The camera man however was shot and the camera landed on the floor. All that could be seen now was more dirt and rocks being flung into the air. Eventually, the rumbling began to cease. Then a large metallic, robot like foot stomped in front of the camera. There was a distinct sound of what could only be described as some sort of very deep metallic chirping. Suddenly the camera jolted as it was picked up by the user of the foot. It must've been gripped very tightly since the camera lenses cracked several times. All that could made out now was the silhouette of a humanoid figure with a bright glowing red eye, and then nothing, everything just went static.


"Reverse and hold at 38.5." Said Anderson.

The clip rewound itself to the best clear shot of the ship they had just seen. No one said anything. Anderson ordered a status report.

"Seventeen minutes out, Captain. No other Alliance ships in the area." Joker replied.

"Take us in, Joker. Fast and quiet. This mission just got a lot more complicated." Said Anderson.

"A small strike team can move quickly without drawing attention. It's our best chance to secure the beacon." Said Nihilus.

Austin continued to stare at the ship a bit longer. There was something about it that felt familiar, but he just couldn't quite put his finger on it.

"Grab your gear and meet us in the cargo hold." Anderson said to Nihilus. Nihilus walked out of the comm room.

Anderson then turned back to Austin. "Tell Alenko and Jenkins to suit up, Commander. You're going in."

The little extensions that I've made to the Eden Prime transmission have been included for a reason. It's my way of allowing a very small peak at the two extra antagonists I've added to my story. If anyone is smart enough to guess what the rumbling is caused by, well done. But please just keep it to yourselves for now. I don't want the surprise ruined.
Chapter 3, Fall of Eden

Chapter 3! This is where we see the story start to take shape. We're first introduced to the main antagonist and we also meet one of the new antagonists that I've made specially for this story.

Nothing more for me to say over than, Enjoy!

Chapter 3

Fall of Eden

"Engaging stealth systems." Said Joker through the radio. "Somebody was doing some serious digging here, Captain."

Austin, Kaiden, Jenkins and Nihilus were all in the cargo bay. Both Kaiden and Jenkins were now in their Alliance armour and helmets. They couldn't help but feel a bit obsolete compared to the Helldiver next to them, who was currently checking his weapons. His suit also appeared to be doing something as well since whole components on it seemed to moving. Panels were popping open and then closing, some small panels rotated, small bits of steam would suddenly shoot out of hidden valves, even certain bits of the armour plating were moving. Kaiden was now finding it difficult to still think of that thing as a suit of armour, the way everything moved on it was so fluid, it was almost as if that whole thing was Shepard's actual skin.

Finally Anderson spoke up. Austin placed his Assault rifle back on his back and turned his attention to the captain.

"Your team's the muscle in this operation, Commander. Go in heavy and head straight for the dig site."

"What about survivors, captain?" Kaiden asked.

"Helping survivors is a secondary objective. The beacon's your top priority." Anderson replied. He had to raise his voice as the cargo bay door opened, letting in the sunlight of Eden Prime and also drowning out a lot of other sounds with the wind.

"Approaching drop point one." Said Joker.

Jenkins turned to Nihilus, who he noticed had also finished suiting up. "Nihilus? You're coming with us?" he asked.

Nihilus shook his head. "I move faster on my own." He replied. Then he left the cargo bay and was gone from sight. Austin stepped up to the very edge of the opened door and looked down at the ground.

"Nihilus will scout out ahead. He'll feed you status reports throughout the mission; otherwise, I want radio silence." Said Anderson.

"We've got his back, Captain. Ready and able!" Austin replied.

"The mission's yours now, Shepard. Good luck!" Anderson shouted.
"We are approaching drop point two." Joker said. The Normandy began to hover over the designated drop off point. Before it had finished descending to a safe height however, to Jenkins' and Kaiden's surprise, Austin jumped.

"Commander!" Kaiden shouted after him. Both soldiers ran to the edge, but they were too late to stop him. When they looked down at the ground however, instead of seeing a body, they saw a small crater with a Helldiver crouched down in the middle. The impact on the ground hadn't even injured the Commander.

"Wow!" Said Jenkins. "I can't believe he survived that."

Anderson smiled. "Why do you think they're called Helldivers, Corporal?" he asked. "They dive into battle, and give their enemies hell!"

Once the Normandy was low enough, Jenkins and Kaiden disembarked. Austin stood up from the crater and unholstered his assault rifle. "Sorry if I gave you a bit of a scare there, gentlemen." He laughed. "I've got a bit too used to that habit."

"At least warn us next time you're going to do something like that, Commander." Said Kaiden.

The other two soldiers unholstered their own weapons and Austin spoke into his wrist communicator.

"Quick comm system check. You read me, Nihilus?"

"Loud and clear, Commander. This place got hit hard. Hostiles everywhere. Keep your guard up. Nihilus out." Came Nihilus's voice through the radio. Austin turned to the other two who nodded.

"Alright guys. Let's find us a beacon. But stay sharp." He said.

They only walked for a few minutes before they came across a very odd sight. They were animals, very large bubble like floating animals.

"What the hell are those?" Kaiden asked.

"Gas bags. Don't worry - they're harmless…” Replied Jenkins.

Austin however wasn't so sure and he fired a shot at one of the creatures. The gas bag exploded in a huge gas explosion causing several bits of burnt flesh and blood to fly everywhere. Austin turned to Jenkins. "You were saying?" he asked sarcastically.

"…as long as you don't shoot them." Jenkins finished.

"Right. Important safety tip." Said Austin. "Let's press on."

A short walk later though, they found an unwelcome sight. Dead human bodies.

"Oh god. What happened here?" Jenkins asked worriedly.

Austin knelt down in front of the bodies. He extended his left hand out and activated his omni tool. A holographic scanner emitted from Austin's wrist and moved over one of the bodies.

"Hmmm. That's interesting." He said.

"What is it?" Asked Kaiden.
"This body's been cooked from laser fire. Who uses laser fire? Plus this one looks like it's been melted. From acid, and they've only been like this for about an hour or so. This is more than a simple colony attack." Said Austin.

As the three soldiers neared a very open field, Austin's visor suddenly lit up. "Hold it, guys!" He ordered. They remained crouched for a while, but nothing happened.

"Hmmm. Must've been my imagination." He said as he indicated to Jenkins to scout ahead.

Suddenly, out of nowhere a pair of large robotic drones with guns attached to their undersides suddenly flew into view. As soon as they spotted Jenkins they opened fire on him instantly. Jenkins's shields didn't seem to make any difference, the laser bolts tore right through his skin, he fell instantly.

"Contact! Contact! Alenko, get to cover!" Austin yelled. Both the soldiers dove for cover behind some rocks. Austin risked one glance at his targets in order to get a clear view. Taking a chance, he fired. The shots from his rifle managed to hit one of them causing it to explode. The other drone however dodged his shots and fired back. Kaiden however quickly counteracted with a biotic blast. The other drone exploded on impact.

"Aenko, are you alright?" Austin asked.

"I'm fine, Commander." Kaiden replied. "What where those things?"

"Wish I knew. But they're too badly damaged for me to scan them properly." Austin responded.

The two soldiers walked over to Jenkins's body. Nothing. He was gone. Kaiden knelt down and closed the Corporals eyes.

"Ripped right through his shields. Never had a chance." He said.

Austin also knelt down. He placed his hand on Jenkins's forehead, bowed his head and mumbled something that Kaiden didn't hear.

"I may not have known him long, but I promise you, I'll make sure he receives a proper memorial service once the mission is complete. But I need you to stay focused, Kaiden."

For a moment Kaiden was silent. That was the first time the commander had called him by his first name. Normally Kaiden would've simply thought that the Helldiver didn't care. To him Jenkins had been obsolete, but the way he had just talked about Jenkins really did sound as if he cared. Maybe the Commander wasn't so different after all.

"Aye, aye, sir." He replied.

With one man down, the two soldiers decided to take it slow and be extra careful. As they neared the top of a hill, Nihilus's voice sounded over the radio.

"I've got some burned out buildings here, Shepard. A lot of bodies. I'm going to check it out. I'll try to catch up with you at the dig site."

They rounded a corner when Austin's visor lit up again, this time it said something different. "Caution! Life form detected!" His suit's computer said.

"Keep your eyes peeled, Aenko. I don't think we're alone here." He said.

Out of nowhere a woman suddenly appeared. She was running. Being chased by two more of the
drones they had just encountered. Austin used his masks zoom to see clearer. Closer inspection showed that the woman was the same Alliance soldier that he had seen in the transmission earlier. From what could be seen of her face, she had tanned skin and white Alliance armour with certain parts coloured pink.

The drones continued to fire on the woman as they chased her. One shot managed to hit her, but her shields managed to absorb the laser. She then pulled out her gun and slid, firing on the drones as she did so. Both the drones exploded from the shots she fired. Then they all noticed something else. There were two tall humanoid like robots with a colonist prisoner. The robots were very odd. They had only one single eye, three fingers and bowed back legs similar to what a Quarian had.

They had their prisoner draped across some sort of tripod. Then suddenly a huge, long spike shot out of the tripod, impaling the colonist in the process. The woman quickly retreated behind a large nearby rock but the robots must have heard her since they turned their attention to where she had just been and began scouting the area.

Austin and Kaiden decided that now was a good time to help. They both fired at the robots from the top of hill. The first robot's head exploded from the heat sinks while the other simply fell down dead.

Austin ran up to the woman, who was catching her breath. "You alright?" he asked.

As soon as the woman saw him she instantly pulled her gun on him, a look of fear in her eyes.

"Whoa! Whoa! It's okay miss! He's on our side! He's a Helldiver!" Kaiden shouted as he caught up. The woman calmed down and slowly lowered her weapon.

"I'm so sorry." She said, clearly out of breath. "I thought you were another one of those things."

"It's alright. You're safe now. Now just take a deep breath." Austin said reassuringly. "What's your name, soldier?"

"Gunnery Chief Ashley Williams of the 212." She responded to Austin. "You the one in charge here, sir?"

"Commander Shepard of the Helldivers." Austin said back. "Are you alright?"

"A few scrapes and bruises. Nothing serious." Ashley replied.

"Where's the rest of your squad?" Austin asked.

"We were patrolling the perimeter when the attack hit. We tried to get off a distress call, but they cut off our communications. We tried to double back to the beacon. But we walked into an ambush. The whole ground started shaking violently as though there was an earthquake. Then this huge thing suddenly burst out of the ground. I couldn't see what it was; I only saw a silhouette and people being burned by some sort of liquid. I don't think any of the others... I think I'm the only one left."

"This isn't your fault, Williams." Austin said reassuringly.

"I know." Ashley replied. "But it doesn't make me feel any better."

Austin unclipped a small flask from the back of his combat belt and gave it to Ashley. "Here. Have some of this. It'll help you get your strength back." Ashley took the flask and began to drink from it. Austin meanwhile went over to the still intact robot corpse. Kaiden walked up to Ashley.
"Any idea what these robots are?" He asked.

"I think they're Geth." Ashley replied.

"What? But that's impossible. The Geth haven't been seen outside the Veil for nearly 200 years."

"No, she's right, Lieutenant. I've scanned the body 3 times and it keeps saying that they're Geth." Austin objected.

"Then why are the Geth here? On a human colony?" Kaiden asked, clearly puzzled.

"They must have come for the beacon." Ashley answered.

Austin stood up and turned back to Ashley. "Ash, do you know where the beacon is? It's imperative that we find it, especially with the Geth here."

"The dig site is close. Just over that rise." Ashley indicated to where the path she had just appeared from lead. "It might still be there."

"We'll take it from here." Austin said.

"Let me come with you, sir. The Geth slaughtered my unit. Give me a chance to get even!" Ashley objected.

"She does know the area, Commander. And we could use the extra firepower." Kaidan added.


"Aye aye, sir." said Ashley.

With the group now back as a team they were able to cover more ground more quickly, plus they didn't need to be as careful as last time. Since Austin had scanned the Geth's corpse, he now had new intel on them and his suit could now detect them. So if the Geth attacked again, they would know about it before it happened. As they neared the dig site, Austin's HUD lit up again. "Geth detected!"

His suits computer voice said.

"I'm detecting more Geth ahead. Be ready." He said to his comrades.

Once they had fought their way through, they came across the dig site. Although the design was clearly Prothean there didn't seem to be what looked like a beacon.

"This is the dig site." Said Ashley. "The beacon was right here. It must have been moved."

"By who? Our side? Or the Geth?" Asked Kaiden.

"Hard to say. Maybe we'll know more after we check out the research camp. It's just on the top of this ridge. Up the ramps." Ashley replied.

Austin looked down at the ground. He noticed what looked like small skid marks and began scanning the ground with his omni tool. "It was dragged." He said. He then took a closer look at the marks. "It was moved by our side. There are human footprints next to the drag marks. Let's check the camp first though. If there are any survivors then they'll most likely be hiding there."

As they started moving up the ridge, Nihilus's voice once again sounded over the radio. "Change of plans, Shepard. There's a small spaceport up ahead. I want to check it out. I'll wait for you there."
The soldiers reached the top of the ridge. The camp looked deserted. There were three more of those strange tripods with spikes that they had seen earlier, all of which had a body impaled on them.

"Looks like they hit the camp hard." Said Ashley.

"It's a good place for an ambush. Keep your guard up." Kaiden responded.

Suddenly, one of the spikes retracted, bringing the body down with it, and it was moving.

"Oh, god! They're still alive!" Kaiden said, horrified.

Something was different about the body though. It wore no clothes. Instead it was covered in wires and tubes that glowed blue with energy. The same had been done to the face, the eyes even glowed, completely robbed of any life the person had once had. The facial expression was one of pain and sadness. It slowly moved itself off of the tripod it had been mounted on. There was a large spark of blue energy as the body dismounted.

"What did the Geth do to them?" Ashley said, also horrified.

The husk looked up at the three soldiers in front of it. It's posture was bent and it appeared to have a limp left arm. It gave a low, menacing groan as it slowly began limping towards them.

"Hold it!" Kaiden ordered.

The husk ignored him and continued moving toward him, picking up its pace a bit.

"I said hold it!" Kaiden ordered.

Still the husk didn't stop. Now it was running at Kaiden, screaming like a wild animal as if it were ready to tear him apart. Kaiden wanted to fire but he kept hesitating. This was, or had been, a person, a human. Did it even know what it was doing, or was it a simple mindless zombie. He couldn't decide.

The husk roared and lunged at Kaiden. Before it got him though, several shots hit the husk in the head and then the chest. Heavy amounts of blood and bright blue liquid oozed from the wounds and the electrics sparked as they were hit. The husk fell hard to the ground. It now lay on the ground, this time completely lifeless. Kaiden looked around. Austin had been the one that had shot the husk for him.

"Thanks." Kaiden said shakily.

"You're welcome. You hesitated after all. It would've killed you if I hadn't." Austin replied.

Suddenly the other two spikes retracted, releasing their husks. This time though there were no hesitations. Austin unclipped one of the grenades strapped to his chest and threw it at the husks feet. It exploded upon impact, blowing both the husks to pieces. Austin knelt down in front of the one he had shot and scanned it.

"What where those things?" Ashley asked, also a little shaken by the husk's attack.

"They looked human. But I've never seen anything like this." Austin replied as he read the scans inside his helmet. "Whatever the Geth did is incredibly complex, even for them." Then his HUD lit up again. "Life forms detected!" His suit said.

"I'm seeing life forms in that building." He said. His comrades raised their guns and took cover close
"Keep me covered. I'll take care of the door." He ordered as he walked up to the locked door. He activated his omni tool and held it close to the lock. The HUD in his helmet showed it was a standard encryption. Easy for any Helldiver to break. His suit could hack through that without any assistance. Sure enough, the locks disabled and the door opened. Austin moved in, assault rifle at the ready.

"Please! Don't kill us!"

Austin immediately lowered his gun once he saw that the two doctors he was looking at where not armed.

"It's okay, it's clear! He yelled to his comrades, who came inside as well.

"Humans! Thanks the maker!" said the doctor who had originally been frightened of Austin.

"They've obviously never seen a Helldiver around here. I thought Eden Prime was in our territory." Austin thought.

The other doctor suddenly moved forward slowly and spoke. "Hurry! Close the door before they come back!" He said.

"Don't worry. We'll protect you." Austin said. "I'm not gonna hurt you. I'm a Helldiver."

"Oh. I'm sorry. It's just, I thought you were one of those things when I saw your helmet." The female doctor replied.

"Don't worry. You're not the first." Said Ashley. "You're Doctor Warren, the one in charge of the excavation. Do you know what happened to the beacon?"

"It was moved to the spaceport this morning." Dr. Warren replied. "Manuel and I stayed behind to help pack up the camp. When the attack came, the marines held them off long enough for us to hide. They gave their lives to save us."

"No one is saved. The age of humanity is ended. Soon, only ruin and corpses will remain." Said Manuel.

Austin stepped up to Manuel as he spoke. Manuel didn't even move as the Helldiver stood right in front of him. Austin scanned both of Manuel's eyes. They were delirious. "What's wrong with your assistant?" He asked as he continued looking face to face at Manuel.

"Manuel has a brilliant mind, but he's always been a bit… unstable. Genius and madness are two sides of the same coin." Dr. Warren replied.

"Is it madness to see the future, to see the destruction rushing towards us? To understand there is no escape? No hope? No, I am not mad. I'm the only sane one left!" said Manuel, still oblivious to the Helldiver standing close enough for Manuel to hear him breathing.

"I gave him an extra dose of his meds after the attack." Dr. Warren added.

Austin moved his right hand in front of Manuel's eyes. There was a small flash, and Manuel suddenly seemed to pass out. Austin however caught him and gently laid him down.

"What did you just do?" Dr. Warren asked, alarmed.

"It's alright. I just put him to sleep." Austin replied. "He clearly wasn't in his right mind. You're lucky
he didn't try anything yet, but he could have easily done something crazy, and dangerous. Don't worry. He'll wake up in a couple of hours."

"I suppose your right. At least by the time he wakes up, the meds will have kicked in." Dr. Warren replied.

"It was better than knocking him out with a punch Dr., trust me. If I'd hit him too hard...could've easily killed him."

"I know." Dr. Warren replied.

Austin turned back to Ashley. "Williams, take us to the spaceport. Dr. Warren, it's best that you lock the door behind us. There may be more Geth out there." He said.

"Good luck, Commander." said Dr. Warren as the soldiers left. The door closed behind them and locked again shortly after.

Nihilus proceeded into the spaceport, gun at the ready. This mission hadn't gone at all to plan, half the colonists where dead, there where Geth everywhere and the beacon hadn't yet been recovered. He took cover behind a nearby crate. Nihilus could sense he wasn't alone, someone else was here. It wasn't a Geth though; Nihilus could smell him, as well as hear him. He took a deep breath and moved out of cover, pointing his gun at his target. When he got a clear look however he was completely stumped.

"Saren?"

Right in front of Nihilus was another Turian. But not just any other Turian, it was Saren Arterius, his old Spectre mentor. Saren turned around at the mention of his name. Unlike Nihilus, Saren looked completely different. For starters his entire left arm was missing. In its place was a cybernetically crafted arm that, oddly enough, closely resembled a Geth's arm. In addition to this, he had various over tubes and cybernetic implants connected to parts of his body. His face was pale grey with no face tattoos, he also had cybernetic implants on his face too, and even his eyes were glowing. He also seemed to wear some sort of cowl over part of his head.

"Nihilus." He spoke. Even Saren's voice appeared to have hints of cybernetic implants. Overall, he wasn't a pretty sight.

"This isn't your mission, Saren. What are you doing here?" Nihilus asked as he lowered his gun.

Saren walked up to Nihilus and placed his non prosthetic hand reassuringly on Nihilus's shoulder.

"The Council thought you could use some help on this one." He replied.

Nihilus relaxed as Saren walked past him.

"I wasn't expecting to find the Geth here. The situation's bad." said Nihilus.

Although Nihilus was known for being one of the best at sensing danger, he failed to notice Saren drawing his gun.

"Don't worry old friend. I've got it under control." He said.

Saren pointed his gun at Nihilus.
"This is very strange." noticed Austin.

The three soldiers where stood in front of what looked like a massive chasm. It looked recent, as though it had just been dug up this morning. But even with the latest technology of today and with earth movers it just didn't seem possible to create something this large in that time.

"This wasn't here earlier; it was all flat last time. The Geth must've done this." Ashley said.

"But what could the Geth have that could cause something like this?" asked Kaiden.

Suddenly, a gun shot rang out in the distance. Immediately the three ran in the shot's direction, as they rounded the corner though, what they saw next left them completely speechless.

"What is that? Off in the distance." Kaiden asked.

Off in the distance was an absolutely massive ship. It was the same ship that had been seen earlier in the transmission. But even though it was still far away, it looked massive. The ships design seemed to resemble a Reaper cuttlefish with some elements of a squid. It seemed to glow and pulse with some sort of red energy and it appeared to be making some kind of odd machine noise.

"It's a ship. Look at the size of it!" Ashley replied.

Although the ship was clearly landed and wasn't going to take off any time soon, it still seemed that some of the mechanical arms it had where moving. It looked and seemed to move like a living creature. Austin's HUD then lit up. More husks and Geth where moving in on them.

"Hold position! We've got the high ground this time." He ordered.

They all took up defensive positions behind rocks. Geth after Geth fell as the soldiers fired on them from the top of the hill. One Geth managed to get close enough, but Austin was prepared for it. He swung out of cover and grabbed the Geth by the neck. He then threw the Geth to the ground and brought his right wrist back. His omni tool flashed on. As it did, a blade suddenly flipped out of it. Before his target could even react Austin brought it right down into the Geth's eye stalk. It blew apart upon impact. That had been one of Austin's favourite weapons, the omni blade. Of course, he had his trusty sword but it was sometimes risky to use it against certain enemies since they could be wearing body armour and that could damage the sword, maybe even break it. So he mostly stuck to using the omni blades, his combat knife, or the hidden wrist blades concealed inside his armour. Once the rest of Geth had been dealt with, the soldiers moved closer to the Spaceport. Then Austin's HUD lit up again.

"More life forms in that building." He said. Once the building's doors had opened the colonists inside filed out.

"Everybody stay calm out there. We're coming out. We're not armed." One of the colonists said.

"Is it safe? Are they gone?" asked a female colonist.

"You're okay now. Nobody's going to hurt you." Austin replied.

"Those things were crawling all over the shed; they would've found us for sure. We owe you our lives." The lead colonist said.

"I still can't believe it. When I saw that ship I thought it was all over." said the female colonist.

The ship she had just mentioned was still there, but the colonists couldn't see it since it was behind
the large hill the building was next to. Austin however still remained vigilant in case the dreadnought started moving.

"It showed up right before the attack. I knew it was trouble the second I saw it." The lead said.

"What do you know about the ship you saw?" Austin asked.

"I was too busy running to get a good look at it." The lead colonist replied. "I think it landed near the spaceport."

"Tell them about the noise, Cole, that awful noise." said the female colonist.

Cole continued. "It was emitting some kind of signal as it descended. Sounded like the shriek of the damned. Only it was coming from inside our own heads."

"It was probably trying to block communication." Austin replied, trying to calm the colonists down.

"Whatever it was, felt like it was tearing right through my skull, almost made it impossible to think." Cole replied.

"We should get moving. It's best you get somewhere safe." Austin said to the colonists.

"Hey, Cole. We're just a bunch of farmers, these guys are soldiers. Maybe we should give them the stuff." Said the other colonist.

"Geez, Blake. You gotta learn when to shut up!" Cole replied.

"Is there something we should know, Cole?" Austin asked sternly. He didn't have to yell at them; his appearance alone was enough to intimidate the colonists into telling him the truth.

"Some guys at the spaceport where running a small smuggling ring. Nothing Major." Cole replied. "In exchange for a cut of the profits, we let them store packages in our sheds."

"You're breaking the law doing that, Cole." Austin replied crossly.

"We're not hurting anybody! Hell, most of the time I don't know what's in the packages. Just thought there might be something we could use."

"Who's your contact at the spaceport, Cole? What's his name?" Ashley asked forcefully.

"He's not a bad guy. I don't want to get him into trouble. Besides, I'm not a snitch!" Cole replied.

"He might have something to do with this whole attack, Cole. We need his name. It's important." Austin replied gently.

"Yeah, okay. You're right. His name's Powell. Works the docks at the spaceport. If he's still alive." Cole replied.

"You did the right thing, Cole." said Austin. "Head back up to the camp. There are two doctors there. You should be safe with them."

The colonists went back up the hill the group had just come while they proceeded into the spaceport, the large mother ship still loomed over them. When they reached the space port however they found an unwelcome sight. Nihilus's body lay on the floor, completely motionless and blood pouring out of the back of his head.
"Oh, Fuck." Austin ran up to Nihilus.

"A Turian? You know him?" Ashley asked

"He's a spectre. He was with us on the Normandy." Kaiden replied. "Must have been one of the Geth."

"I don't think so." said Austin. "The Geth use lasers. If a Geth had killed him the wound would be cauterised and it wouldn't be bleeding. This was a heat sink round, and at point blank range. Keep your guard up. Whoever did this might still be around." Suddenly his suit detected movement.

"Something's moving! Over behind those crates!" Ashley said.

All the soldiers readied their guns and pointed them at the crates.

"Come out! We know you're there!" Austin shouted.

A man emerged slowly from behind the crates with his hands raised.

"Wait! Don't—don't shoot! I'm one of you! I'm human." He said quickly.

Austin lowered his gun; the other two did the same. "You need to be more careful. Sneaking up on us like that could've got you killed!"

"I..., I'm sorry. I was hiding, from those creatures." The man replied. "My name's Powell. I saw what happened to that Turian. The other one shot him."

"What other one?" Austin asked. "Tell me what happened."

"The other one got here first. He was waiting when your friend showed up. He called him, Saren. I think they knew each other. Your friend seemed to relax. He let his guard down… and Saren killed him. Shot him right in the back of the head. I'm just lucky he didn't see me behind the crates." Powell replied.

"We were told a Prothean beacon was brought to the spaceport. What happened to it?" Austin asked as his mind went back to the mission at hand.

"It's over on the other platform, probably where that guy Saren was heading. He hopped on the cargo train right after he killed your friend." Powell answered. "I knew that beacon was trouble. Everything's gone to hell since we found it. First that damn ship showed up, then the attack. They killed everyone. Everyone! If I hadn't been behind the crates I'd be dead, too!"

"How come you're the only one who survived? Why didn't anyone else try to hide behind the crates?" Austin asked.

"They never had a chance. I… I was already behind the crates when the attack started." Powell answered.

"Wait a minute. You were hiding behind the crates before the attack?" Kaiden asked suspiciously.

"I… Sometimes I need a nap to get through my shift." Powell answered. "I sneak off behind the crates to grab forty winks where the supervisor can't find me."

"You survived because you're lazy? asked Ashley.

"If you hadn't snuck off for that nap you'd probably be dead just like the others." said Austin.
"Yeah. Yeah, I guess. I don't really want to think about it." Powell replied.

"Hold on! You're Cole's contact here on the docks. For the smuggling ring," said Austin.


"It does if it's weapons." Austin replied crossly. He wasn't happy at this, The Arkane council often lent some weapons to human colonises. Eden Prime was one of them.

"You greedy son of a bitch!” Ashley shouted. "We're out here trying to protect your sorry ass and all you can think about is how you can rip us off?"

"I never thought you'd actually need all of this equipment. Who'd want to attack Eden Prime? We're just a bunch of farmers! How was I supposed to know?" Powell replied defensively.

"Calm down, Williams. Forget about him. He's not worth it." said Austin.

"You're lucky that he's here, Powell. Otherwise I'd be having a serious word with you about this. Hand over what you've taken, we could use it!" said Ashley.

"Here, it's all I have. Take them. My smuggling days are over. I swear it." Powell replied, handing over some bits of technology and even a Helldiver Pistol. Austin was disgusted by this. Fortunately his helmet hid his expressions.

"You still have something else on you! My suit can sense that you're lying!" He said to Powell, this time not trying to hide his anger but he quickly calmed down, remembering his training. "A lot of marines died here today Powell. This tech could have come in handy. If I were you, I'd think of some way to make it up to them."

"Yeah, okay. There is something else I was saving. Could be worth a fortune. Experimental technology, top of the line. Here, take it. I don't need it. I didn't want anyone to get hurt. Really. I'm sorry." Powell said as he handed over what looked like a tactical cloak armour implant. This took Austin by surprise. The Arkanes didn't often share their latest inventions until they knew the current one was out of date and ready to be replaced by a new model, and the tactical cloak had only just recently been invented. Why was one of these on Eden Prime? He would have to investigate after the mission was over.

"We'd better find that beacon before it's too late." He said to the other two.

"Take the cargo tram." said Powell. "That's where the other Turian went. But be careful, I think that's also where the ship is currently landed as well. I can't stay here. I need to get away from all this." Powell left, leaving the soldiers to get to the cargo tram.

Saren walked past the rest of the Geth who were securing the perimeter. He had what he came for, now it was time to make sure no one else knew about his presence and the Geths. He walked up to his lieutenant, the one he had taken to calling, The Terror Geth.

This particular Geth was vastly different and completely distinguishable from the others. Like the others it shared the same Geth body type, but the similarities ended there. It was a Geth prime, so it stood much taller than the other Geth and other life forms. A bit of extra height though made it taller than even a normal Geth prime. It was covered in large armour plates that covered every bit of its body rather than having some of the tubes and wires exposed like the others. It's head was also vastly different so that it was distinguishable from the others. Whilst all Geth had plain white optic eyes, the
Terror Geth had a large red one. Two long horns also protruded outward from its head like a Bull. It also had the spikes that all Geth had at the bottom of their faces, but they were slightly longer, and more pointy. The most distinguishable features of its face though were the flaps on its face. This was the first of the Geth to have flaps that would move to resemble eyebrows. The Terror Geth though always had his flapped out so that it not only looked like a crest, but also so that it looked like it was always angry. In place of its right arm it had a massive plasma blaster that was powerful enough to blast through almost anything. A tube was connected from the gun to a socket on its back. There were also some more small spikes on its shoulders, it was more muscular and it lacked the same bowed back legs that all Geth had. Instead, it had more normal human like legs. But they were still taller, hence the Terror Geth's extra height and larger feet. Probably the most frightening thing about this Geth though was its voice. Unlike all other Geth which made a light mechanical chirping sound, the Terror Geth made a more deep metallic groaning noise as if it was mad or angry. Overall the Terror Geth was so frightening that even Saren did sometimes feel a bit nervous around his lieutenant.

"Set the charges. Destroy the entire colony. Leave no evidence that we were here." Saren ordered.

The Terror Geth nodded and made a low menacing growl in response. It then turned to the other Geth, motioning them to get to work. Saren meanwhile walked up to the Prothean beacon that he and his Geth had come for. As he approached it the beacon started to pulse and then he was suddenly lifted into the air.

The cargo tram neared the end of its journey. As they neared their stop, Austin spotted more Geth. Just off a few metres in the distance stood the massive ship, up close it towered about two whole kilometres. Suddenly a Geth soldier spotted them and they dove for cover. Then The Terror Geth saw them. It growled and ordered the other Geth to fire on the humans while the remaining Geth set the demolition charges, any other Geth seemed to be heading back to the massive dreadnought which looked as though it was preparing to take off. The Terror Geth charged up its plasma cannon and fired at the tram.

"Incoming! Move!" Austin shouted. All three soldiers leapt off the tram just the plasma shot hit it, and it exploded.

"That is one scary ass Geth." said Kaiden as they dived for cover.

"I saw that Geth earlier. It was leading the assault. I think that's their leader." said Ash.

"We've got a bigger problem." Austin said as he motioned to a large device with a countdown on it. "Demolition charges! The Geth must have planted them."

"Hurry – We need to find them all and shut them down!" said Ash.

"Okay. Here's the plan. You two cover me and draw their fire. I'll disable the charges." said Austin.

As Austin began disabling the first charge, Ashley and Kaiden began firing at the Geth units from cover. The Terror Geth growled as several Geth soldiers were caught in the gunfire. It angrily motioned for some more Geth to concentrate their fire on the humans. It charged up another plasma shot.

"Move!" shouted Kaiden as he pushed Ashley out of the way.

The Terror Geth fired another shot but that one missed as well.

"Hey! Over here you bastard!" Austin shouted as he fired a concussive round at the Terror Geth. It
hit the Geth but when the smoke of the impact cleared it didn't look as though he'd made a dent. "Why do you never play fair?" Austin shouted as he ducked behind cover and disabled the last demolition charge. He then activated his secret weapon. A small compartment on the left wrist of his suit opened and a small gun appeared out of it. His mini nuke launcher. Once the shot was fully charged he moved out of cover and aimed the shot. "Fire in the hole!" he yelled. The nuke soared towards the Terror Geth, but at the last moment it activated a shield of some kind. It stopped the nuke mostly but when the smoke cleared it was obvious that it had done some damage. The Terror Geth clutched at its side which had been either blown apart or badly damaged, at the last moment it retreated back to the dreadnought. Before the humans could pursue, loads of dust, dirt and rock was thrown into the air as the ship's main thrusters fired and soared off into the sky.

When the smoke cleared there was nothing. All the Geth had either been killed by them or retreated to their ship which was gone now. Where it had been was a massive crater which looked like a nuclear bomb had been dropped. Then they saw the beacon, it was still intact.

"Normandy. The beacon is secure. Requesting immediate evac." Austin spoke into his wrist communicator as Ashley and Kaiden walked up to the beacon.

"This is amazing. Actual working Prothean technology. Unbelievable!" said Kaiden

"It wasn't doing anything like that when they dug it up. Something must have activated it." said Ashley as she stepped closer to the beacon. Kaiden walked back over to Austin.

"Roger, Normandy. Standing by." Austin said as he ended the transmission and nodded to Kaiden.

As Ashley took a closer look the beacon suddenly admitted a pulse and some invisible force started to pull her towards the beacon. Despite Ashley's best efforts she couldn't get free.

Austin noticed and ran over to her. Using all the enhanced strength his suit had he pulled Ashley out of the way. However the gravity field suddenly pulled him in, he tried everything but he couldn't break free. Then he was suddenly lifted into the air by an invisible force.

"Shepard!"

"Don't touch him! It's too dangerous!" Kaiden shouted as he held her back.

Several horrifying vivid images seemed to flash before Austin's eyes before everything went black. The beacon exploded. The force of the blast sent Austin flying, as he hit the ground his whole suit seemed to shimmer white and emit some kind of mechanical screech, and then he completely froze.

"Commander!" Kaidan yelled as he and Ashley ran up to him.

They tried to remove his helmet but no luck. It was as if it was welded shut. They then tried to move his arms and legs to make him more comfortable but they couldn't do that either. His whole armour was completely frozen in place.

"I can't move him at all. He's completely frozen." Ashley said.

Fortunately at that exact moment, the Normandy touched down.

Hope you enjoyed this chapter. Also if you're still finding it a bit difficult to picture the Terror Geth try to think of Shockwave from Transformers 3. The Terror Geth is basically based on his design. I've also done a fanart of him. So that should clear things up. You can also expect to see the Terror Geth again, he'll be a recurring villain throughout the whole story.
As always reviews are welcome.
Chapter 4, The Citadel

Chapter 4. Now we get introduced to Garrus and Wrex. We also meet Shepard's own Helldiver mentor in this chapter.

Happy reading.

Chapter 4

The Citadel

Saren sat in his command chair, thinking to himself. He wasn't alone though. In the room with him was the Terror Geth, who had now been repaired from the damaged he had sustained from the Helldiver. They were then joined as Saren's second in command, an Asari came walking up to them. She was an Asari Matriarch, an Asari that had entered the final stages of their lives, so she was very old. She was clad in a black dress with a black crown like head dress. The Matriarch cleared her throat and spoke.

"We identified the ship that touched down on Eden Prime. The Normandy. A human Alliance vessel. It was under the command of Captain Anderson. They managed to save the colony." She said.

"And the beacon?" asked Saren.

"One of the humans may have used it." The Matriarch replied.

Upon hearing this, the whole room seemed to glow red and Saren started to roar in frustration and anger. He flung things across the room. Both the Terror Geth and the Matriarch merely stood where they were. Saren's rage didn't frighten them, this had not been the first time and they had defiantly had worse. Saren stormed up to the Matriarch and seized her. As he looked at her though, face to face, he seemed to calm down. He slowly released his grip on the Matriarch.

"This human must be eliminated." Saren said coldly.

The Matriarch nodded and smiled evilly. Saren turned to the Terror Geth who nodded in response and emitted a deep, evil, metallic growl of excitement.

"What do you mean there's nothing you can do?" Ashley asked as she and Dr. Chakwas looked over the frozen body of their commander. They were in the med bay of the Normandy. Kaiden and Ashley had carried the frozen Helldiver into the Med bay where he had since stayed in the exact same position. Heart monitors seemed to confirm that Austin was still alive inside the suit, but clearly not conscious. Plus they could still hear the suit's heavy metallic breathing.

"His suit is in lockdown mode. There's nothing we can do but wait until he regains consciousness." Dr. Chakwas replied.

"What do you mean lockdown?" Ashley asked.

"When a Helldiver's armour goes into lockdown mode, the whole thing freezes up and becomes surrounded by some kind of invisible field that's completely impossible to penetrate. It prevents the suit from being removed by any enemies." said Dr. Chakwas.
"Can't we just turn it off?" Ashley asked.

"No. All of his suit's systems are locked down as well. All we can do is monitor what the suit is doing. For now though Shepard's life signs look stable and his suit is saying that there aren't any injuries. So he's perfectly safe in that thing."

"What triggered the lockdown?"

"If you say it happened after the beacon exploded than the commander must have fallen unconscious. That's probably what triggered it. The suit constantly monitors its user's life signs. If the heart rate drops to low and the user loses consciousness then it locks everything down in order to protect its master."

Ashley was slightly surprised by the Doctor's extensive knowledge of Helldivers.

"What happens if the user dies?" Ashley asked nervously.

"If the heart flat lines for too long the suit first attempts to revive the user. If all its attempts fail then the suit vaporises itself." Chakwas replied.

"What?!" Ashley replied, alarmed.

"The Arkanes can't afford for their technology to fall into the wrong hands."

"How is it you know so much about them Doctor? You're an Alliance medical doctor. Not a Helldiver medic."

"I was originally stationed on Arkadia a few years ago. At that time they had a lot of wounded and they were in need of a lot of doctors. During that time I learned a lot about Helldivers and I also met the Commander."

"So is there really nothing we can do."

"I'm afraid not Mrs Williams. All we can do is waiting and let the suit take care of him until he regains consciousness.

Austin slowly woke up and became aware of his surroundings. He was still inside his suit, he felt rather uncomfortable. Then he became aware that he couldn't move so he'd probably been lying in the same position for a long time. At the moment his suit's computer was asleep so he had to wake it up. His head was throbbing and he was finding it hard to focus. He could hear muffled voice outside of his helmet.

"Activate." He managed to say painfully.

There were a number of beeps and whirs and the familiar warming up sound as his suit reactivated. "System restarting. Please wait…" His suits computer said. "Lockdown mode currently engaged. Scanning all primary systems."

The familiar process of his running its diagnostics began running. His suits' optical feed then came back online and he could hear again. From the looks of things he was in a med bay. Then he heard two familiar voices.

"Hold on. Something's happening; his heart rate just went up. He might be coming around." He heard Dr. Chakwas say as she moved over to the monitors.
"Suit scans complete. No damage detected. Life support status 100%. All systems reactivated. Disengaging Lockdown mode." The suit said.

"He's moving." said Ashley. The suit flashed white again as the shield and the lockdown deactivated. Austin's suit went limp and collapsed into a more comfortable lying down position. "Lockdown mode deactivated. Clear to proceed." It was a few moments before Austin tried to move. His whole body ached due to its stiffness. That was the one disadvantage of the Lockdown, it always ended up leaving its users with stiff joints due to the lack of movements. Finally Austin's vision cleared he slowly started to sit up.

"Doctor Chakwas. I think he's waking up." He heard Ashley say.

As Austin sat up he attempted to rub his still throbbing head. However his mind was still so confused that he forgot that he still had his helmet on. As he looked up he saw Dr. Chakwas staring back at him.

"You had us worried there, Shepard. How are you feeling?" she asked.

Austin coughed to clear his dry throat before he spoke. "Minor throbbing and my whole body feels stiff, but nothing serious. How long was I out?" he groaned.

"About fifteen hours. Something happened down there with the beacon, I think." Chakwas answered.

"It's my fault. I must have triggered some kind of security field when I approached it. You had to haul me out of the way." said Ashley.

Austin sighed. He wanted to berate Ashley for that, but at the same time he knew it wasn't her fault. Still, he didn't feel like saying that either. Technically if she'd kept her distance, it wouldn't' have happened

In the end, he decided to just move on from the subject.

"What happened to the beacon?" he asked.

"The beacon exploded. A system overload, maybe. The blast must've knocked you cold and then your suit completely froze up. The Lieutenant and I carried you back to the ship." said Ashley.

Austin lifted his hands to his head and removed his helmet. He coughed again before Ashley handed him some water.

On Eden Prime, Ashley hadn't got a single look at Austin's face. Now though she had a clear look at him.

For a soldier he had surprisingly long brown hair. Given however that Helldivers didn't have the same sort of restrictions when it came to hair, it made sense that he was allowed to have it that long. The hair was pretty much let down without anything tying it back, so it did frame his face a little bit, but only on the sides. It was parted down the left of his head, with either sides facing away from each other so that they hung down from either side of his face. Fairly lengthy, but short enough to not be falt or prove impractical. Facial hair wise, he had a very noticeable beard. His neck and everythign below his jawline however was cleanly shaven. The beard was very shortly, but neatly, trimmed, so it almost looked more like a stubble rather than a fully grown long beard.
Despite the appearance being something one wouldn't' expect from a soldier, it did actually work well for him. Ashley found it hard to deny that it did actually make him look a bit dashing or like the sort of man who often used charm and had a way with women. His dark brown eyes had a hard but gentle look to them. The most noticeable feature about him though where his scars. He only had a few but they were all noticeable, even at long range. There was a small one on his left cheek that extended just below his mouth, another two small ones across his nose and on his forehead. A rather long one ran up the right side of his neck and finally, the most noticeable, a long but deep scar across his right eye. A bit of the middle portion of his right eyebrow was missing because of the scar. There was also the smallest sign of an acid burns right next to his left eye and on his chin. Even without his helmet, it was clear he had a British accent.

Austin then started typing into his omni tool.

"So, any damage my suit didn't detect, Doc?" he asked.

"Physically, you're fine. But I did detect some unusual brain activity, abnormal beta waves. Your suit also showed an increase in you rapid eye movement, sign typically associated with intense dreaming." Chakwas replied.

Austin typed again at his omni tool; a holographic image came up in front of his face. It showed what he had seen before the beacon had exploded. It still didn't make any sense though; it was a just brief, but disturbing flashes and images.

"I saw—I'm not sure what I saw. Death. Destruction. None of it makes sense." Austin replied, rubbing his eyes.

"Hmmm. I better add this to my report. It may…" said Chakwas before Captain Anderson suddenly entered the med bay.

"How's he holding up, Doctor?" he asked.

"All the readings look normal. I'd say the Commander's going to be fine." Chakwas replied as Austin put his helmet back on.

"Glad to hear it." said Anderson. "Shepard, I need to speak with you – in private."

"Aye, aye, captain. I'll be in the mess if you need me." said Ashley as she saluted and walked out with Chakwas. As she walked out she nodded to Austin who nodded back.

"Sounds like that beacon hit you pretty hard, Commander. You sure you're okay?" Anderson asked.

"I've had worse." Austin replied casually with a shrug sadly. "Though I'm sorry about Jenkins."

"Jenkins wasn't your fault. You did a good job, Shepard." said Anderson.

"How come Chief Williams is on board? She wasn't part of the Normandy crew last time I checked." Austin asked.

"I figured we could use a soldier like her. She's been reassigned to the Normandy. She should prove a valuable asset." said Anderson.

"You said you had something important to talk to me about?" Austin asked.

"I won't lie to you, Shepard. Things look bad. Nihilus is dead. The beacon was destroyed and Geth are invading. The Citadel Council's going to want answers." Anderson replied.
"Well then we simply tell them what happened. I didn't do anything wrong, Captain." Austin replied sternly.

"I'll stand by you and your report, Shepard. You're a dammed hero in my books. That's not why I'm here. It's Saren, that other Turian. Saren's a spectre, one of the best. A living legend, but if he's working with the Geth, it means he's gone rouge. A rouge spectre's trouble. Saren's dangerous and he hates humans." said Anderson.

"Why?" Austin asked.

"He thinks we're growing too fast, taking over the galaxy. Some aliens think that way; you of all people should know that. Most of them don't do anything about it. But Saren has allied himself with the Geth. I don't know how. I don't know why. I only know it had something to do with that beacon. You were there just before that beacon self-destructed. Did you see anything? Any clue that might tell us what Saren was after?"

"I saw something. I don't know what though. All I could see was all these images and flashes. They looked like synthetics. Geth, maybe. Slaughtering people. Butchering them." Austin replied.

"We need to report this to the council, Shepard." said Anderson.

"Forget it Anderson! They'll just think I'm crazy. I have a reputation to keep and I'm not losing it over a bloody vision!" Austin said back angrily.

"We don't know what information was stored in that beacon. Lost Prothean technology? Blueprints for some ancient weapon of mass destruction? Whatever it was, Saren took it. But I know Saren. I know his reputation, his politics. He believes humans are a blight on the galaxy. This attack was an act of war! He has the secrets from the beacon. He has an army of Geth at his command. And he won't stop until he's wiped humanity from the face of the galaxy!" said Anderson.

"With all due respect, Anderson I think that's a bit of an overreaction." Austin replied.

"Maybe. But we can't ignore Saren's involvement in this. We should be getting close to The Citadel. Head up to the bridge and tell Joker to bring us into dock." said Anderson as he walked off.

Since they were already near the Citadel, Austin saw no point in removing his armour. As he walked out of the med bay he found Ash leaning against a nearby wall.

"Glad you're okay, Commander. The crew could use some good news after what happened to Jenkins." She said.

"A shame. He had a lot of potential." said Austin.

"Part of me feels guilty over what happened. If Jenkins was still alive, I might not be here." said Ashley.

"It is what it is." Austin simply shrugged.

"I guess you're right." said Ashley.

"It was pretty rough down there. You okay?" Austin asked supportingly.

"I've seen friends die before, comes with being a marine. But to see my whole unit wiped out… And
you never get used to seeing dead civilians. But things would have been a lot worse if you hadn't shown up." Ashley replied.

"True, but it still could've gone better. Not what I would call mission accomplished." said Austin.

"You still saved a lot of lives, Commander."

"True. I suppose there is a bright side to look on." Austin admitted. "Anyway, I need to go speak with Joker." said Austin as he left for the bridge.

The crew was more silent than they had been previously. The loss of Jenkins had been very hard for them. As Austin approached the bridge Joker noticed him.

"Good timing, Commander. I was just about to bring us in to the Citadel. See that taxpayer money at work." He said.

As the Normandy cleared the Mass Relay all that could be seen out of the windows were bright clouds. Eventually though the clouds cleared to reveal the massive space station they were heading to. The Citadel. The massive space station wasn't complex looking. Really was just a massive ring with five long arms extending from it. The sheer size of it though was amazing. As the Normandy moved in closer the fleets and star ships became visible. One in particular ship stood out from the rest. The massive Asari dreadnought, the Destiny Ascension.

Ashley and Kaiden soon joined Austin on the bridge. Ashley walked up to the window and stared out at the fleets.

"Look at the size of that ship!" She said.


"Well, size isn't everything." said Joker.

"Why so touchy, Joker?" asked Ashley.

"I'm just saying you need firepower, too." Joker responded as the Normandy flew past the dreadnought.

"Look at that monster! Its main gun could rip through the barriers of any ship in the Alliance fleet" said Ashley.

"Good thing it's on our side then." Kaiden responded.

"This is an outrage! The Council would step in if the Geth attacked a Turian colony!"

They were in the Presidium part of the Citadel. Austin, Ashley, Kaiden and Captain Anderson where waiting for the humanities representative on the Citadel, Ambassador Udina to finish talking with the Citadel Council. The Ambassador was stood in front of three holographic projections of each member on the council. A Turian, an Asari and a Salarian. They did not look happy.

"The Turians don't found colonies on the borders of the Terminus Systems, Ambassador." said the Salarian councillor.

"Humanity was well aware of the risks before you went into the Traverse." said the Asari councillor.

"What about Saren? You can't just ignore a rouge Spectre. I demand action!" Ambassador Udina
shouted.

"You don't get to make demands of the Council, Ambassador." The Turian councillor said angrily.

"Citadel security is investigating your charges against Saren. We will discuss the C-sec findings at the hearing. Not before." Said the Asari Councillor before the holograms disappeared. Ambassador Udina walked up to the three soldiers and the Captain.

"Captain Anderson. I see you brought half your crew with you." said Udina.

"Just the ground team from Eden Prime. In case you had any questions." Anderson replied.

"I have the mission reports. I assume they're accurate?" Udina asked.

Austin really didn't like Udina's attitude. The only thing that he'd seen compare with that sort of thing was a Batarian. Still, it wasn't enough for him to say "Shut up!". It took a lot to make Austin angry. But he still wished the Ambassador would lighten up. If the whole human race knew they were being represented by this idiot they'd be humiliated.

"They are." Anderson replied. "Sounds like you convinced the Council to give us an audience."

"They were not happy about it. Saren's their top agent. They don't like him being accused of treason." said Udina.

"Of course they wouldn't." said Austin annoyingly. "Still, what do you expect? Spectres are always trouble. I've worked with a few before. They always abuse the power that they're given. Think the stars shine out of their asses."

"Settle down, Commander. You've…"

"You watch your attitude with me, Ambassador!" Austin responded angrily. "Because if you don't I can easily just break your jaw to shut you up. The Arkane Council don't like Helldivers being held back by politics. They're just a waste of time. So don't you tell me to settle down!"

"Well I wouldn't recommend it. You've already done enough to jeopardize your candidacy for the Spectres. The mission on Eden Prime was a chance to prove you could get the job done. Instead, Nihilus ended up dead and the beacon was destroyed!" said Udina.

"Don't try to make it sound as if it's my fault!" Austin shouted as he leaned in close to Udina.

"Then we better hope the C-sec investigation turns up useful evidence to support our accusations. Otherwise the Council might use this as an excuse to keep you out of the Spectres. Come with me, Captain. I want to go over a few things before the hearing." Said Udina as he and Anderson left the embassy room.

"And that's why I hate politicians." said Ashley.

As they exited the elevator they found themselves in the Citadel Tower. The room was enormous. In front of them were two Turians arguing. One of them appeared to be part of C-sec agent since he was wearing the traditional black and blue Turian armour that all Citadel Security agents had. He had a visor over his left eye and blue facial tattoos. The other Turian, Austin knew. This Turian was Executor Pallin, head of Citadel Security and most likely the other Turian's boss.

"Saren's hiding something! Give me more time. Stall them." said the C-sec Turian.
"Stall the Council?" asked the Pallin. "Don't be ridiculous! You're investigation is over, Garrus."

The Executor walked off. The C-sec Turian, Garrus turned to face Austin and the others and walked up to them.

"Commander Shepard? Garrus Vakarian. I was the officer in charge of the investigation into Saren." He said.

"Sounds like you really want to bring him down." said Austin.

"I don't trust him. Something about him rubs me the wrong way. But he's a Spectre; everything he touches is classified. I can't find any hard evidence." said Garrus.

"I think the Council's ready for us, Commander." said Kaiden.

"Good luck, Shepard. Maybe they'll listen to you." said Garrus.

"I doubt it." Austin replied. "To them I'm just a soldier who fights for a race who operates in both Council space and the Terminus Systems. They'll just see me as someone who's about to start a war."

When they got to the stairs leading to the Council stands, Captain Anderson was waiting for them. To everyone's surprise however there was also another Helldiver. Unlike Austin though this one was vastly different, he was an Arkane Helldiver. His armour had the same helmet design that all Helldivers had. Once again though there were some additions. In particular there were two large horns attached to the helmet. He had a large white mane attached to his back and shoulders. In addition he had several ammo canisters strapped to his armour and a large Katana on his back. Overall he had a warlord type of look to him.

"Commander Shepard. Good to finally see you again, boy." He said.

"General Zartrack!" said Austin as he saluted. "This is unexpected. I didn't expect to see you here."

"At ease, Shepard." said Zartrack and Austin relaxed.

"So what brings you here, sir?" Austin asked.

"The Arkane Council sent me." Zartrack replied. "They've read the mission reports from Eden Prime. I'm here to just make sure that the Citadel Council doesn't try to blame my best student for any of this. Also the Arkane's are not happy that the Alliance lied to them and kept your Spectre candidacy a secret." Zartrack turned to Anderson as he said the last bit.

"The Alliance brass was worried that the Arkanes would refuse to let Shepard join. Humanity needs this." Anderson replied defensively.

"Don't think that you know their minds, Captain!" Zartrack replied angrily. "They would've welcomed something like this. Shepard may still be with the Alliance, Captain, but that does not mean you can simply take him away from the Helldivers without them knowing about it. The Commander is one of their best soldiers. You can guarantee that the Alliance brass will be hearing from the Arkane Council after this!"

"Alenko, Williams, this is General Zartrack, my former Helldiver mentor and fencing master. General, this Lieutenant Kaiden Alenko and Gunnery Chief Ashley Williams." said Austin.

The other two saluted the Helldiver General who saluted back at them.
"Anyway, the hearing's already started. Come on." said Anderson.

Udina was already addressing the council. Towering over the council to their left was a large orange hologram of Saren.

"The Geth attack is a matter of some concern. But there is nothing to indicate Saren was involved in any way." said the Asari councillor.

"The investigation by Citadel Security turned up no evidence to support your charge of treason." said the Turian councillor.

"Of course they wouldn't." said Zartrack sarcastically. "What do you expect when you make anything they touch classified to C-sec and don't keep an eye on them?"

"An eyewitness saw him kill Nihilus in cold blood!" said Udina.

"We've read the Eden Prime reports, Ambassador. The testimony of one traumatized dock worker is hardly compelling proof." said the Salarian councillor.

"I resent these accusations," said Saren. "Nihilus was a fellow Spectre. And a friend."

"That just let you catch him off guard!" said Anderson.

"Captain Anderson. You always seem to be involved when humanity makes false charges against me. And this must be your protégé, Commander Shepard. The one who let the beacon get destroyed." said Saren.

"Don't try to blame this on him, Spectre." Said Zartrack angrily with his arms crossed. "Besides, the mission to Eden Prime was top secret. The only way you could know about that beacon was if you were there!"

"With Nihilus gone, his files passed on to me. I read the Eden Prime report. I was unimpressed. But what can you expect from a human?" Saren indicated to the council.

"If you're trying to insult me, Saren you're not doing a very good job of it. I've met Hanar that are more insulting than you. Besides, we all know you hate humanity. That's why you attacked Eden Prime. You think because you're a damn Spectre you can get away with whatever the hell you want!" Austin replied defensively.

"You're species needs to learn its place, Shepard." said Saren. "You're not ready to join the Council. You're not even ready to join the Spectres!"

"He has no right to say that! That's not his decision!" Udina shouted.

"Shepard's admission into the Spectres is not the purpose of this meeting." said the Asari councillor.

"This meeting has no purpose." Saren replied. "The humans are wasting your time, Councillor. And mine."

"Yes that's right. Just hide behind the council like a fucking, Turian coward. You Spectres are all the same. And you councillors should open your damn eyes!" said Zartrack.

"What we need is evidence. So far, we have seen nothing." said the Salarian councillor.

"There is still one outstanding issue: Commander Shepard's vision. It may have been triggered by the beacon." said Anderson.
Austin face palmed and groaned in frustration. "You stupid, bloody, idiot!" he mumbled under his breath so that the Captain wouldn't hear him.

"Are we allowing dreams into evidence now?" Saren asked the Council. "How can I defend my innocence against this kind of testimony?"

"I agree. Our judgement must be based on facts and evidence, not wild imaginings and reckless speculation." replied the Turian councillor.

"Do you have anything else to add, Commander Shepard?" asked the Salarian Councillor.

"You've made your decision. I won't waste my breath. It's obvious you won't listen." Austin replied.

All three of councillors shook their heads at each other and then turned back to the humans and Helldivers.

"The Council has found no evidence of any connection between Saren and the Geth. Ambassador, your petition to have him disbarred from the Spectres is denied." said the Asari councillor.

"I'm glad to see justice was served." Said Saren coldly before his hologram vanished.

"This meeting is adjourned." said the Asari Councillor.

Everyone departed, save Udina who lingered behind before then following, clearly sulking.

"It was a mistake bringing you into that hearing, Captain. You and Saren have too much history. It made the Council question our motives." said Udina annoyingly.

"I know Saren. He's working with the Geth for one reason; to exterminate the entire human race. Every colony we have is at risk. Every world we control is in danger. Even Earth isn't safe." said Anderson.

"That's enough, Captain!" said Zartrack. "The Ambassador's right. You're taking this way too personally. You need to calm down."

"Regardless though, we can't let Saren get away with attacking one of our colonies, especially if he's with the Geth." said Austin.

"As a Spectre, he's virtually untouchable. We need to find some way to expose him." said Udina.

"What about Garrus, that C-sec investigator? We saw him arguing with the executor." suggested Kaiden.

"That's right! He was asking for more time to finish his report. Seems like he was close to finding something on Saren." Ashley replied.

"Any idea where we could find him?" Austin asked.

"I have a contact in C-sec who can help us track Garrus down. His name is Harkin." Udina replied.

"Forget it. They suspended Harkin last month. Drinking on the job. I won't waste my time with that loser." said Anderson angrily.

"That's not your choice to make, Captain!" said Zartrack.
"General Zartrack is right, Captain. Anyway, you won't have to. I don't want the Council using your past history with Saren as an excuse to ignore anything we turn up. Shepard will handle this." said Udina.

"Woah, that's a bit harsh, Ambassador. You can't just cut Captain Anderson out of this investigation." said Austin.

"No, the Ambassador's right. I need to step aside." Anderson replied.

"I need to take care of some business. Captain, meet me in my office later." said Udina as he walked off.

"Harkin's probably getting drunk at Chora's Den. It's a dingy little club in the lower section of the wards." said Anderson.

"Garrus might not be the only lead. Maybe there's another way to find evidence against Saren." Austin suggested.

"You should talk to Barla Von. Over in the financial district. Rumour has it he's an agent for the Shadow Broker." said Anderson.

"The Shadow Broker?" Ashley asked.

"An information dealer. Buys and sells secrets to the highest bidder." Zartrack replied. "I've heard Barla Von's one of his top representatives. He might know something about Saren. But his information won't come cheap. I'll also contact our own information broker, Sparkle. See if she can find anything. She's the second best info broker in the galaxy. She's bound to have some information on Saren."

"Good idea, General." Anderson replied. He then turned back to Austin. "Good luck, Shepard. I'll be over in the ambassador's office if you need anything else."

Anderson walked off leaving the two Alliance soldiers and Helldivers. Austin turned to Zartrack.

"Good luck, Shepard. My job here is done. If Sparkle finds anything useful I'll let you know. Good to see you again old friend." said Zartrack.

"Good to see you again as well, sir." Austin replied as the two Helldivers shook hands.

Zartrack then left as well leaving the three soldiers alone.

"We'll deal with this, Harkin first." Austin said.

Chora's den wasn't what Austin had expected. As soon as he and his companions entered they were greeted by sight of several Asari, and human strippers. Austin couldn't help but stare at the Asari a bit; fortunately his helmet prevented his friends from seeing. It was no secret that he fancied Asari more than humans but in a place like this it was best not to let that interest show.

"I see why this place is so popular. It's got quite the, uh, feel." said Kaiden, trying hard to ignore the dancers. Ashley noticed his staring.

"Hey, Lieutenant, put your tongue back in your mouth before you trip on it." She said. "Honestly. A million light years from where humanity began and we walk into a bar filled with men drooling over half-naked women shaking their asses on a stage. I can't decide whether that's funny or sad."
"What? You don't think they're here because of the food." Kaiden asked.

Austin then spotted Harkin. Before they reached him however they came across two Krogan arguing. One was dressed formally; the other was clad in battle armour.

"Back off, Wrex! Fist told us to take you down if you showed up!" said the Patron angrily.

"What are you waiting for? I'm standing right here." Said the other Krogan named Wrex. "This is Fist's only chance. If he's smart, he'll take it."

"He's not coming out, Wrex! End of story!" said the Patron.

"This story is just beginning." said Wrex coldly. "Out of my way humans, I have no quarrel with you." He said as he pushed past the soldiers.

"What was that all about?" asked Kaiden.

"Who knows? Let's just try not to get caught in the middle." said Ashley.

As Wrex left Chora's Den, the soldiers headed over to Harkin.


"I'm looking for a C-sec officer. A Turian named Garrus. Where is he?" Austin asked forcefully.

"Garrus? Ha! You must be one of Captain Anderson's crew. Poor bastards still trying to bring Saren down? I know where Garrus is, but you gotta tell me something. Did the Captain let you in on his big secret?" Harkin asked.

Austin lost his patience and grabbed Harkin by the neck and started to squeeze very hard, fortunately no one seemed to notice or care.

"Perhaps you didn't hear me right, Harkin. Where's Garrus? Tell me! Or my helmet is gonna be the last face you ever see!"

Harkin chocked and struggled to breathe as Austin's mechanical grip tightened around his wind pipe.

"Dr. Michel's office…. Clinic in the wards… Other side of the wards!" he choked up before Austin released his grip.

"Thanks." He said evilly. "I better not see you again, because if I do you'll be in a wheelchair next time, and quit the drinking. You're a fucking mess."

The three soldiers left Harkin as he chocked for air and headed out of the club. Their next stop, the wards.

As they neared Dr. Michel's office they could hear commotion inside. When the door opened they saw Garrus hiding in cover. Dr. Michel was being harassed by several thugs.

"I didn't tell anyone. I swear!" She said.

"That was smart, Doc.", said the lead Thug. "Now if Garrus comes round you stay smart or we'll…" he was interrupted though when he saw Austin. He grabbed the doctor and pointed his gun at the Helldiver. "Who are you?!"
"Let her go!" Austin yelled as he unholstered his Assault rifle. Garrus took this chance, popped out of cover and fired. The shot hit the thug square in the head and missed Dr. Michel, who ran to hide. One thug threw a grenade at Austin but he was clever. He caught the grenade with a lightning reflex and threw it back. The grenade exploded, killing the other two thugs in the process.

"Perfect timing, Shepard." said Garrus. "Gave me a clear shot at that bastard."

"That was a good, Garrus, but it was risky. You almost hit the hostage." Austin replied. He turned back to Dr. Michel. "You okay?"

"I'm fine. Thanks to you. All of you." Dr. Michel replied.

"I know those men threatened you. But if you tell us who they work for, we can protect you." Austin said reassuringly.

"They work for Fist." Dr. Michel replied. "They wanted to shut me up, keep me from telling Garrus about the Quarian."

"What Quarian?" asked Austin.

"A few days ago, a Quarian came by my office. She'd been shot, but she wouldn't tell me who did it. I could tell she was scared, probably on the run. She asked me about the Shadow Broker. She wanted to trade information in exchange for a safe place to hide." Dr. Michel replied.

"Where is she now?" Austin asked.

"I put her in contact with Fist. He's an agent for the Shadow Broker."

"Not anymore." said Garrus. "Now he works for Saren and The Shadow Broker isn't too happy about it."

"Fist betrayed The Shadow Broker? That's stupid, even for him. Saren must have made him quite the offer." said Dr. Michel.

"That Quarian must have something Saren wants, something worth crossing the Shadow Broker to get." said Garrus.

"What else can you tell me about this, Quarian?" Austin asked.

"I'm not sure. Like I said, she wanted to trade information for a place to hide. She didn't… Wait a minute… Geth! Her information had something to do with the Geth." said Dr. Michel.

"She must be able to link Saren to the Geth. There's no way the Council can ignore this!" said Garrus.

"Then I think it's time we paid Fist a visit." said Austin.

"This is your show, Shepard. But I want to bring Saren down as much as you do. I'm coming with you!" said Garrus.

"You're a Turian. Why do you want to bring down one of your own?" Austin asked.

"I couldn't find the proof I needed in my investigation. But I knew what was really going on. Saren is a traitor to the Council, and a disgrace to my people!" Garrus replied. That was more than enough to convince Austin.
"Well then, when you put it that way. Welcome aboard, Garrus." Austin shook his hand in confirmation.

"You know we aren't the only one after Fist. The Shadow Broker hired a Krogan bounty hunter named Wrex to take him out."

"Yeah. We saw him in the bar." said Ashley.

"A Krogan might come in handy." Austin replied.

"Last I heard he was at the C-sec academy."

"What's he doing there?" asked Kaiden.

"Fist accused him of making threats. We brought Wrex in for a little talk. If you hurry you can catch him at the academy before he leaves." Garrus replied.

"We'd better get moving then." said Austin.

As Austin, Ashley and Garrus exited the elevator they spotted who they were looking for. Wrex was currently being detained by some C-sec guards. Back in the bar Austin hadn't bothered to get a proper look at the Krogan. Now though he was surprised. Wrex had several battle scars on his crest and face. From the looks of things he estimated that Wrex was fairly old.

"Witnesses saw you making threats in Fist's bar. Stay away from him." said the C-sec guard.

"I don't take orders from you." said Wrex. There was no hint of fear in his voice. In fact Wrex looked as though he was ready to gun everyone down in this room. He reminded Austin a lot of Kraan.

"This is your only warning, Wrex."

"You should warn Fist. I will kill him."

"You want me to arrest you?"

"I want you to try." Wrex laughed. He then noticed the group and pushed the officer out of the way.

"Do I know you, Helldiver?" Wrex asked.

"Commander Austin Shepard of the Helldivers. I'm going after Fist. I thought you might want to come along." Austin replied.

"Ah. Shepard. Commander Shepard. I've heard a lot about you. We're both warriors, Shepard. Out of respect I'll give you a fair warning." Wrex said as he inched his face closer to Austin's helmet. "I'm going to kill Fist."

"Fist knows you're coming. We'll have a better chance if we all work together." said Garrus. Wrex nodded slightly.

"My people have a saying. Seek the enemy of your enemy and you will find a friend."

"Sounds like you and I are going to get along just fine, Wrex. Welcome aboard." said Austin as he and Wrex shook hands.
"Let's go then. I hate to keep Fist waiting." said Wrex.

As always General Zartrack is based off of another Helldiver design on Deviantart. This one is called Helldiver Zatoichi. Simply look for that if it's hard to picture.

Next chapter should be up within the next few days. Keep those reviews coming. They're what keeps me going.
Chapter 5, A Spectre for Humanity

Chapter 5 will now introduce Tali, the truth about the Reapers and Shepard becomes a Spectre. I enjoyed writing this one more than than usual since there's so many different things going on in this chapter, plus there are some more personal moments for Shepard, which allow me to develop his character better. After all, that's one of my most important things to include in this story.

Hope you enjoy.

Chapter 5

A Spectre for Humanity

Once the group arrived they found Chora's Den locked down.

"Now's a good chance for me to try out a new tactic I've always wanted to try." Said Austin. "Garrus you take cover there. Wrex once I give the word you charge in and give them hell. I'll provide cover with a smoke grenade and suppressing fire. Then we'll both move in and finish off any more of Fist's thugs. Understand?"

"I like the way you think, Shepard." Said Wrex.

Garrus took cover on one side of the door while Wrex readied himself to charge in. Austin took another small device from the back of his combat belt and attached it to the door. "Placing detonator." Once the detonator had been armed Austin stepped back slightly and then took cover on the side opposite Garrus. "Clear!" The detonator exploded blowing the entire door apart and sending it flying into the club. "Wrex, now!" Austin yelled. Wrex roared and stormed into the club. At the same time Austin took a smoke grenade from his chest and threw it in as Wrex rushed passed him. With Wrex concealed by the smoke it made it much harder for the thugs to see Wrex. But Wrex was wearing his helmet, so he could still see. As Garrus and Austin waited outside they could hear several shotgun bangs before the smoke eventually cleared. Both Austin and Garrus moved into the bar. Wrex had managed to gun down most of the thugs but there were still some left the other two. Garrus managed to land headshots on two others with his sniper rifle while Austin was able to gun down three others with his Assault rifle and sever one in half with his sword.

"Nicely down you two." Said Austin. "If that's how you're always going to fight, Fist isn't going to stand a chance."

When they opened the door to Fist's office they were greeted by two more men who held their guns at them.

"Warehouse workers. All the real guards must be dead." Said Garrus.

"Stay back or we'll shoot!" said one of the workers.

"Listen. We're not here for you, we're here for Fist. This would be a good time to find somewhere else to work." Said Austin.

The two workers relaxed and lowered their guns. "Yeah. Yeah, right. That's a good idea." Said one of them. "I never like Fist anyway." Said the other as they both walked off.
"It would've been quicker to just kill them." Said Wrex.

"Shooting people isn't always the answer, Wrex." Said Austin.

Now came the next door. Fist was waiting for them but he hadn't counted on a Helldiver coming for him. Both of Fists turrets fell within seconds and then Fist.

"Wait! Don't kill me! I surrender!" Fist pleaded.

Austin walked up to Fist and held him tightly by the neck then he activated his omni clearly got the message. If he didn't talk, he'd be sliced in half.

"Where's the Quarian?!" Austin asked forcefully.

"She's not here. I don't know where she is. That's the truth!" Fist replied.

"He's no use to you now. Let me kill him." Said Wrex.

Austin shrugged. "He's all yours."

Fist quickly reconsidered. "Wait! Wait! I don't know where the Quarian is, but I know where you can find her."

"I'm listening." Said Austin coldly.

"The Quarian isn't here. Said she'd only deal with the Shadow Broker himself." Fist said.

"Face to face? Impossible! Even I was hired through an agent." Said Wrex.

Austin still kept a tight hold on Fist's neck, his omni blade still ready to do some cutting. "Goon." He said.

"Nobody meets the Shadow Broker. Ever. Even I don't know his true identity. But she didn't know that. I told her I'd set a meeting up. But when she shows up, it'll be Saren's men waiting for her." Said Fist.

Austin brought his omni blade in line with Fist's neck, ready to slice him open. "Tell me where that meeting is before I slice you lying head off!" Austin yelled.

"Here on the wards!" Fist pleaded. "The back alley by the markets. She's supposed to meet them right now. You can make it if you hurry."

Austin released his grip on Fist and threw him to the floor. As Fist got to his feet Wrex pulled out his shotgun and shot Fist. This took Garrus by complete surprise. Austin however merely flinched.

"What are you doing?!" Garrus yelled.

"The Shadow Broker paid me to kill him. I don't leave jobs half done." Wrex responded.

"While I agree Fist deserved that, at least warn me next time you're going to do something sudden like that, Wrex. I don't want you suddenly to start thinking about shooting me in the back."

"Calm down, Shepard. If I ever think about shooting you, you'll know about it first." Wrex replied.

"That Quarian's dead if we don't go now!" said Garrus urgently.
"Let's move it, guys!" said Austin. With that they rushed out of the club. Austin stayed behind for a quick moment to grab some suspicious looking OSDs. He figured they might come in handy.

Finally the made it to the meeting place. The Quarian and some of Saren's thugs where already there. There was a Turian and two Eclipse Salarians.

"Did you bring it?" the Turian asked the Quarian.

"Where's the Shadow Broker? Where's Fist" the Quarian asked.

"They'll be here. Where's the evidence?" the Turian asked. He ran his hand along the Quarian's arm. The Quarian however did not approve of the Turian feeling her up and instantly slapped his hand away.

"No way! The deal's off." She said angrily.

The Turian motioned too his Salarian henchmen and they drew their weapons. The Quarian however instantly reacted by throwing a grenade at them. Austin, Garrus and Wrex took this as their cue to enter the fight. They rushed in guns blazing. Once the fight was done Austin helped the Quarian up. She looked and sounded rather young. Her suit was the sort Leena had worn back when she first joined the Helldivers. Austin guessed this young woman was still on her pilgrimage.

"Fist set me up! I knew I couldn't trust him!" she yelled.

"You alright? Where you hurt in the fight?" Austin asked.

"I know how to look after myself. Not that I don't appreciate the help." The Quarian replied." Who, and what are you exactly?" she stared at Austin up and down. She had obviously never seen a Helldiver before and she looked fascinated.

"Commander Austin Shepard of the Helldiver's, at you service miss. I'm looking for evidence to prove Saren's a traitor. I'm told that you have that evidence." Austin replied.

"Then I have a chance to repay you for saving my life. But not here. We need to go somewhere safe." Said the Quarian.

"We'll take you to the human embassy." Austin responded "The human ambassador will want to see this anyway."

The group left for the Citadel embassies, with the Quarian in tow. Once they arrived however Udina didn't look pleased to see them.

"You're not making my life easy, Shepard." He said. "Firefights in the wards? An all-out assault on Chora's Den? Do you know how many…" he stopped however when he saw the Quarian. "Who's this? A Quarian? What are you up to, Shepard?"

"If you'll shut up and stop complaining for one minute I'll show you. This young woman has the evidence you need to prove Saren's guilt. Oh, and greet me like that again and I personally guarantee that you will spend the next whole year in a wheelchair, got it!?" Austin replied.

"I apologise, Commander. This whole case with Saren has me a little on edge." Udina apologised. He then turned to the Quarian. "Maybe you'd better start at the beginning, Miss…?"

"My name is Tali. Tali Zorah nar Rayya." The Quarian replied.
"We don't see many Quarians here. Why did you leave the flotilla?" Udina asked.

"She's on her pilgrimage. Her rite of passage into adulthood. Am I correct Miss Zorah?" Austin asked.

"Yes. How did you know?" Tali asked.

"I'm a Helldiver. Some of your people are too. As a result the Arkanes make sure all Helldivers understand the culture, religion and history of other species since we have to work and fight alongside them." Austin replied. "Plus you look and seem the right age to be on pilgrimage, and all female Quarians on pilgrimage have the same suit design as you. It wasn't hard for me to work out."

"Wow. I knew Helldivers where clever. I had no idea they were that clever." Said Tali surprisingly.

"Thanks." Said Austin. "Anyway, you were saying, Tali."

"During my travels I began hearing reports of Geth. Since they drove my people into exile, the Geth have never ventured beyond the veil. I was curious." Said Tali "I tracked a patrol of Geth to an uncharted world. I waited for one to become separated from its unit. Then I disabled it and removed its memory core."

"I thought the Geth fried their memory cores when they died. Some kind of defence mechanism." Said Anderson.

"My people created the Geth. If you're quick and careful, and lucky small caches of data can sometimes be saved. Most of the core was wiped clean. But I salvaged something from its audio banks." Said Tali. She activated her omni tool and pressed a few buttons.

"Eden Prime was a major victory! The beacon has brought us one step closer to finding the Conduit." Came Saren's voice from Tali's omni tool.

"That's Saren's voice. This proves he was involved in the attack!" said Anderson.

"What's the Conduit? Any idea what it means?" Austin asked.

"The Conduit must have something to do with the beacon. Maybe it's some kind of Prothean technology… like a weapon." Said Anderson.

"Wait… there's more. Saren wasn't working alone." Said Tali as she pressed again at her Omni tool.

"Eden Prime was a major victory! The beacon has brought us one step closer to finding the Conduit." Said Saren's voice again, but then another female voice followed. "And one step closer to the return of the Reapers."

"I don't recognise that other voice. The one talking about Reapers." Said Udina

"Reapers… Reapers… Why does that name sound familiar? Are they some kind of new alien species?" Austin asked.

"According to the memory core, the Reapers were a hyper-advanced machine race that existed 50,000 years ago. The Reapers hunted the Protheans to total extinction, and then they vanished. At least, that's what the Geth believe." Tali replied.

"Sounds a little far-fetched." Said Udina.

"Wait… Now I remember. The vision on Eden Prime – I think I'm beginning to understand it now. I
saw the Protheans being wiped out by the Reapers." Said Austin.

"The Geth revere the Reapers as gods, the pinnacle of non-organic life. And they believe Saren knows how to bring the Reapers back." Said Tali.

"The Council is just going to love this." Said Udina confidently.

"They won't believe us about the Reapers. They'll just dismiss it as a legend. But this definitely proves now that Saren is a traitor." Said Austin.

"You're right. We need to present this to the Council." Udina responded.

"What about her? The Quarian?" asked Wrex.

"My name is Tali!" Tali said annoyingly. "You saw me in the alley, Commander. You know what I can do. Let me come with you."

"What about you're Pilgrimage?" Austin asked.

"The Pilgrimage proves we are willing to give ourselves for the greater good. What does it say about me if I turn my back on this? Saren is a danger to the entire galaxy. My Pilgrimage can wait."

"Touché. When you put it that way, I'll take all the help I can get, Tali Zorah Nar Rayya." Said Austin.

"Thanks. You won't regret this." Said Tali happily as she joined the group.

"Anderson and I will go ahead to get things ready with the Council. Take a few minutes to collect yourself, then meet us in the tower." Said Udina as he Anderson walked off.

On their way to the tower Austin had decided to do a bit of sightseeing. They were in no rush to get to the tower after all so he had left the others in the Bar, Flux, for a small drink while he went to explore the wards and stretch his legs a bit. He hadn't been to the Citadel that much and often when he had it had been on duty and he hadn't had a chance to look around. Now though he had some time to himself, and what better way to spend that time than walking in the Wards with a huge view of the rest of the Citadel. As he neared the markets he heard a woman calling his name. He walked up to her and she introduced herself.

"Commander Shepard, I'm Emily Wong." Said the woman. "I'm an investigative journalist working here on the Citadel. Could I have a moment of your time?"

"Of course, Mrs Wong." Austin replied. "How may I help you?"

"I've been hunting for evidence of corruption and organized crime on the Citadel; there are places I can't go. Rumours say that you recently took down a man named, Fist. I was sure he was a big player in anything going on here. Did you find anything in his office that could help me?" she asked.

"As a matter of fact, I do. These OSDs might have what you're looking for. Take them. I was thinking the press would benefit from this anyway." Austin replied as he handed the OSDs he'd collected from Fist's office earlier over to the reporter.

"You've got Fist's files?" she said in disbelief. "This could be even bigger than I'd hoped! Here, Commander. For your trouble." Emily handed Austin a small sum of credits.

"What would my future cooperation be worth? Say, an interview when my investigation is over?"
Austin asked suggestively. Normally he hated interviews; after all, he wasn't what people would call
a public spectacle. Also he'd met a lot of bad reporters in his time. There had been some good ones
though, and he'd heard that Mrs Wong was one of the good wouldn't mind an interview with her.

"Exclusive? You talk to me before anyone else?" Emily replied. "That would be worth quite a bit,
and I'd be very happy to compensate you accordingly. Here you are." She handed him some more
credits. "Now if you'll excuse me, I should go see what's on these discs."

"See you soon, Mrs Wong." Austin replied.

As he continued into the Markets he saw the massive Destiny Ascension fly slowly past the Wards.
Then he overheard his name again. This time it came from a man. He didn't look that old, probably
just a bit younger than him. He approached the man who stood back in surprise when he saw him.

"Wow! You're Commander Shepard, the hero of Eden Prime, hero of Elysium, leader of Alpha
Squad, and the first Alliance marine to become a Helldiver. I am so honoured to meet you." He said.

"Nice to meet you. And you are…?" Austin asked as he shook the man's hand. He hadn't realised he
was this popular even outside the Alliance.

"My name is Conrad. Conrad Verner. They say you killed more than a hundred Geth on Eden
Prime!" he said.

"I don't like to boast. But I spent most of the time trying to stay alive and help the colonists." Austin
replied, trying not to sound smug.

"Hey, I know you're probably busy, but do you have time for a quick autograph?" Conrad asked.

"But, of course. Anything for a fan. Here you go." Austin replied. He took a small data pad from
Conrad and signed his name on it.

"Thanks. I really appreciate it. My wife is going to be so impressed! I'll let you get back to work, but
next time you're on Earth, I'd love to buy you a drink! Thanks again!" said Conrad.

"I'll look forward to it then. See you soon." Said Austin as Conrad left.

Having met enough new people for one day Austin decided to head back to Flux pick up his
comrades. Wrex and Tali where right where he'd left them, sitting at a table having a small drink. As
Austin headed over to their table he overheard a conversation between a woman and a Volus. The
Volus said something about it being out of his hands. Austin walked up to the woman named Rita,
according to the Volus.

"Sorry, I'm kinda busy right now. So, uh, what can I do for you?" Rita asked.

"What were you discussing with the Volus?" Austin asked.

"Who, Doran? I was just asking him about my sister. She worked for Doran before she left to…
Sorry, I don't want to bore you with my problems." Rita answered.

"No, please. I'm interested to hear what you have to say." Austin replied.

"Well, okay. My sister Jenna left here to go work at Chora's Den. The problem is, she's working as
an informant for C-sec. You know, eavesdropping on the people there. If they find out what she's
doing, they'll kill her." Said Rita.
"Being an informant is a dangerous job." Said Austin.

"That's what I've been telling her. I don't know. Sometimes I think she stays there just to spite me." Said Rita.

"Do you know who her contact in C-sec is?" Austin asked.

"No, it's all very secret. Last time I asked an officer he told me to stay out of it - *for Jenna's safety.*" Rita replied.

"Maybe I could help her understand just how dangerous Chora's Den is." Austin suggested.

"Would you? That'd be great. Just don't tell her I sent you." Said Rita.

Austin nodded and then went over to collect Wrex and Tali. For now dealing with Jenna would have to wait. The Council where probably ready by now.

"Come on. Udina's presenting the Quarian's evidence to the Council." Said Anderson as they walked up the stairs.

They were now back in the Council chambers. Udina was once again playing the recording of Saren and the unknown voice to the Council.

"You wanted proof. There it is." Said Udina.

"This evidence is irrefutable, Ambassador. Saren will be stripped of his Spectre status and all efforts will be made to bring him in to answer for his crimes." Said the Turian councillor.

"I recognize the other voice, the one speaking with Saren." Said the Asari councillor. "Matriarch Benezia."

"Who's she?" Austin asked.

"Matriarchs are powerful Asari who have entered the final stage of their lives. Revered for their wisdom and experience, they serve as guides and mentors to my people. Matriarch Benezia is a powerful biotic, and she had many followers. She will make a formidable ally for Saren." The Asari councillor replied.

"I'm more interested in the Reapers. What do you know about them?" asked the Salarian councillor.

"Only what was extracted from the Geth's memory core. The Reapers were an ancient race of machines that wiped out the Protheans. Then they vanished." Said Anderson.

"The Geth worship the Reapers as their gods." Said Austin. "And they seem to think that Saren is the prophet for their return."

"I think the Conduit may be the key to bringing them back." Said Anderson. "Saren's searching for it. That's why he attacked Eden Prime."

"Do we even know what this Conduit is?" the Salarian councillor asked.

"I'm afraid not." Austin replied. "Saren though seems to think it can bring them back. It's crazy, I know. However I'm not saying we should just ignore it."

"Saren wants to bring back the machines that wiped out all life in the galaxy? That's impossible. It
"has to be." Said the Turian councillor. "Where did the Reapers go? Why did they vanish? How come
we've found no trace of their existence? If they were real, we'd have found something."

"Most likely Saren made that up. How else would he get the Geth to work for him?" Austin asked.

"We tried to warn you about Saren, and you refused to face the truth. Don't make the same mistake
again." Said Anderson.

"This is different, Captain. You proved Saren betrayed the Council. We all agree Saren is using the
Geth to search for the Conduit, but we don't really know why." The Asari councillor replied.

"The Reapers are obviously just a myth. A convenient lie to cover Saren's true purpose. A legend he
is using to bend the Geth to his will." Said the Salarian councillor.

"Precisely. The Geth would never follow Saren because he's an organic. They're only following him
because he somehow managed to make them think the Reapers existed." Said Austin.


"Forget about the vision Anderson. That's no good to the Council and it's definitely no good to me.
At the moment we can only assume that the Reapers are a myth." Said Austin.

"Shepard you can't side with the Council over this!" said Anderson desperately.

"I'm not siding with anyone, Anderson! I'm speaking my mind. If you think the Reapers are real,
fine. But don't try to make me look like a fool. You've already done enough to make the Council
think I'm crazy, I won't have any more of it!" Austin responded angrily.

"But Shepard…"

"That's enough, Anderson! This isn't helping!" Udina shouted to shut Anderson up.

"Saren is a rouge agent on the run for his life. He no longer has the rights or resources of a Spectre.
The Council has stripped him of his position." Said the Turian councillor.

"That is not good enough! You know he's hiding somewhere in the Traverse. Send your fleet in!"
Udina shouted.

"A fleet cannot track down one man." Said the Salarian councillor.

"A Citadel fleet could secure the entire region. Keep the Geth from attacking any more of our
colonies." Said Udina.

"Or it could trigger a war with the Terminus Systems! We won't be dragged into a galactic
confrontation over a few dozen human colonies!" said the Turian councillor. "Besides, the Helldivers
are in charge of colonies in the Terminus Systems. Let them take care of the colonies. Or is Eden
Prime proof that you can't rely on them anymore?"

"How dare you!" Austin shouted. "You can dismiss sending in your fleet. But don't ever criticize my
kin! Besides, you want us to do it because you're too cowardly to be a bit braver about this! Why do
you even let us on the Citadel if when humanity asks for help, you ignore us?! Its cowardly idiots
like you force the Arkanes and the Helldivers to take these matters into their own hands!"

"Shepard's right! I'm sick of this Council and its anti-human bull—." Udina yelled, but he was
interrupted by the Asari councillor.
"Ambassador! There is another solution. A way to stop Saren that does not require fleets or armies." She said,

"No! It's too soon. Humanity is not ready for the responsibilities that come with joining the Spectres." The Turian councillor objected.

Austin immediately fell silent. He could tell where this was going. He didn't want to be a Spectre and he would not have anyone goad him into it. There was a small silence.

"Shepard. Say something. There talking about your position in the Spectres!" Udina still remained silent and ignored him. He'd let the Council decide not to. If he didn't say anything, he wouldn't get the position. Unfortunately Anderson then spoke.

"It works out for everyone Councillor." He said. "You don't have to send a fleet into the Traverse and the Ambassador gets his human Spectre. Everybody's happy."

Austin face palmed again and groaned. He didn't care if Anderson heard him this time.

"God damn you, Anderson!" he said. Somehow though Anderson still didn't hear him.

The other Councillors turned to each other and nodded. They pressed a few buttons on their pads and then turned back to the humans.

"Commander Shepard - step forward." Said the Asari councillor.

Austin was very tempted not to. There was no way he was going to acknowledge this to anyone else. As far as he was concerned it was a simple formality, nothing more. He hated the Spectres. To be one made his hate even worse. But he just couldn't find it in his heart to turn his back on all of humanity; they did need this after all. Very reluctantly he stepped didn't go for a formal stance, there was no way he would do that.

"It is the decision of the Council that you be granted all the powers and privileges of the Special Tactics and Reconnaissance branch of the Citadel."

"Spectres are not trained, but chosen. Individuals forged in the fire of service and battle; those whose actions elevate them above the rank of fire."

"Spectres are an ideal, a symbol. The embodiment of courage, determination, and self-reliance. They are the right hand of the Council, instruments of our will."

"Blah, blah, blah!" Austin thought. "Just get on with it!"

"Spectres bear a great burden. They are protectors of galactic peace, both our first and last line of defence. The safety of the galaxy is there to uphold."

"You are the first human Spectre, Commander. This is a great accomplishment for you and your entire species."

"Yes, great." Said Austin sarcastically. "So, I guess I'm going after Saren?"

"We're sending you into the Traverse after Saren. He's a fugitive on the run so you are authorized to use any means necessary to apprehend or eliminate him."

"That won't be necessary. I'll handle this mission as I've handled every other mission, the Helldiver way. By the rules." Austin said sternly.
"This meeting of the Council is adjourned." Said the Asari councillor.

The other Councillors left while Austin turned back to Udina and Anderson.

"Congratulations, Commander." Said Anderson. He offered Austin his hand but the Helldiver didn't shake it back.

"We've got a lot of work to do, Shepard. You're going to need a ship, a crew, supplies…” said Udina.

"Don't need it. I'll just go back to the Helldivers and get what I need." Said Austin.

"If only it where that simple." Said Udina coldly. "Anderson, come with me. I'll need your help to set all this up."

The Ambassador and the Captain left, leaving Austin with his comrades.

"Bastard didn't even thank you." Said Wrex.

"What do you expect from a politician?" Austin said sarcastically. "Besides, I never asked for this anyway. You head back to the Normandy. I've got some things to take care of on the Citadel still before I head back."

"As you wish, Shepard." Said Tali.

True Austin still had things that needed doing. Talking to Jenna for example was one of his top priorities before heading back. However he was quite stressed.

A Spectre?! He couldn't believe it. True being able to operate without restrictions had its advantages but he got roughly the same experience with the Helldivers. He could only imagine that when news reached his team mates about this, they would be, 1. Disappointed that he wouldn't be able to spend any leave with them at all now, and 2. They'd probably think he wasn't enjoying this. All of Alpha squad had made several bad run in's with Spectres. They had even had to work with one once, that hadn't been a fun experience. Every Spectre he'd met had been selfish, they had always fallen to their pride and greed and thought that because they were above the law, it made it okay to boss them around and even start fights to get what they want. The one they had worked with had even jeopardized the mission for the Citadel Council had revoked his status for it. After that though the Arkanes had forbidden Spectres from working with Helldiver teams again. Something that Austin had been glad of. He had despised Spectres even before working with them. He and his team hated the idea of someone having unlimited power with no accountability. Yet here he was now, one of them. At least there where some upsides to it though. Humanity would at least be looked at bit differently now and so, hopefully, would the Helldivers.

Austin was currently leaning on one of the balconies overlooking the Presidium. It was very pretty, pretty enough to help Austin relax a bit and take his mind off things a bit. He couldn't help but notice the occasional stares some people where giving him. Helldivers didn't often come to the Citadel unless they were on a mission. Some did occasionally come for shore leave though. In fact Austin and his team had planned to spend shore leave here at some point.

Austin got up and decided to take a stroll to clear his head up a bit. His mind still kept wondering back to his old team and also to him being a Spectre. Then he noticed something. A sign that said, Consort Chambers. Austin stopped when he saw this. He had heard about the legendary Asari consort Sha'ira, how she offered personal service to people as well as entertainment and conversation, even advice.
"It couldn't hurt to try I suppose." he thought to himself. Often it was hard to get an appointment with her since she often had so many customers but it couldn't hurt to try, perhaps he would get lucky.

As he walked in, he was greeted by an Asari.

"Welcome. I am Nelyna." She said warmly. "I don't recognize you as one of our expected clients today. Would you like me to see when the Consort will be able to meet with you?"

"Can't I just go in?" Austin asked.

"Mm, I'm afraid not. Yeah, you must understand, there are many who seek the Consorts services. But if you wish to leave your name, she'll make every effort to meet with you." Nelyna replied.

"Very well then. Commander Austin Shepard. With the Helldivers." Said Austin.

"Excellent. You should hear something in… hmm, three or four months." Said Nelyna as she added Austin's name to the client list.


"Well, that's not for me to judge. I have your name and you'll be contacted. Is there anything else?" she asked.

"Oh well. At least I tried." Austin thought to himself. "No thanks. I think I'm done here." He said to Nelyna.

"Aw. Well, I hope that you will return again in the future, we always enjoy seeing new clients." She said.

Then her comm suddenly came on. She put her hand to her ear. "Yes, Sha'ira?" she could hear a voice in her ear but he couldn't tell what it was saying. "Yes. Of course, mistress." She then turned back to Austin. "Huh. It appears the Consort has taken notice of you. She'd like to meet with you."

"Oh. Good. Where do I go then?" Austin asked.

"Just head upstairs. She will be waiting for you." Nelyna replied.

Austin followed Nelyna's instructions and headed up the stairs. He then found himself inside a small but intricately designed room and in front of him stood the very elegant figure of the Asari Consort. At the moment she had her back to him but she was aware of his removed his helmet when he saw her, he wanted to appear polite.

"That is close enough, Commander." She said "I've heard a great many things about you since your arrival here on our Citadel."

"What exactly do you do?" Austin asked.

"That depends on your needs. I offer advice to some, comfort to others. I have a certain problem that could use your expertise". Sha'ira replied. She then turned around and walked up to Austin. Sha'ira had no facial tattoos like some other Asari had. Still somehow there really was something alluring about her. She was so elegant and gorgeous. Plus the dress that she wore left little to the imagination of what her body was like. Her voice also had a lot of gentleness in it. Hearing that alone was somehow very calming for Austin.
"I have a friend. Septimus, a retired Turian general. I won't discuss the details, but he wanted me to be more than I could be. We had a falling out. Now he spends his days in Chora's Den drinking and spreading lies about me." She said. "If you would speak to him as a fellow soldier, I believe he will listen to you and let the matter be." She reached her hand up and touched his face as she spoke.

"What happened between you?" Austin asked.

"I respect his privacy too much to go into the details. If he wishes to tell you what happened, that is his prerogative." Sha'ira replied.

"As you wish. What exactly do you want me to tell him?" Austin asked.

"Appeal to his sense of honor. Remind him of his position as a General." Sha'ira replied. She then unexpectedly walked up and hugged Austin. He was surprised but he didn't try to push her away.

"If you could convince him to stop spreading lies about me, I would be very grateful." She said as she embraced him. She then turned her back again and walked back to where she had been standing.

"Now, I must ask you to take your leave. I have many clients waiting so see me." She said.

"Well, this works out fine. I needed to get to Chora's Den anyway, now I can get both jobs done in the same time." Austin thought to himself.

Even without Fist running things now, Chora's Den still appeared to be in full swing. Austin then spotted General Septimus and decided to sort him out first and then take care of the business with Jenna.

"Commander? Hmph. What do you want?" he asked.

"I'm here on Sha'ira's behalf. Your lies are hurting her." Austin replied.

"Good! Her lies have been killing me for days. I've seen a lot of horrible things in my days and there's only one woman in this damn galaxy that helps me forget it." Said Septimus.

"This is pathetic. What could a woman do to put you in this state?" Austin asked.

"Cause she rejected me. Me! Septimus Oraka, general of the Turian fleet." Septimus replied.

"I think I can see why you're upset, but spreading these lies won't make it better." Said Austin.

"Look, kid. I appreciate what you're trying to do, but don't waste your time." Said Septimus.

"General, did you ever win a battle by moping in a bar?" Austin asked.

"Ha, war! That's what this feels like all right. How did I let it come to this? So you think it's that easy? Just straighten up and act like a General?" Septimus asked.

"It damn well couldn't hurt." Austin responded.

"Huh. Maybe you're right, Commander. Sha'ira's worth the effort... even if she won't have me back." said Septimus.

"Precisely. Plus this is no place for someone of your stature, General." Austin replied.

"All right. I'll go to her... after I've had a cold shower. Or two. Say, you're a bright you be interested
in earning a few extra credits?" Septimus asked.

"That depends on what the job is. What do you want me to do?" Austin asked.

"There's an Elcor diplomat out there who believes Sha'ira gave up his secrets." Septimus replied.

"Why would he think that?" Austin asked.

"Because I told him. Look, I just need you to convince him of the truth." said Septimus.

"What makes you think he'll believe me? He's a diplomat, I'm a Helldiver." Austin asked.

"You'll bring him proof. Take this datapad. It shows where I got my info. It will exonerate Sha'ira and convince the Elcor."Septimus replied.

"Okay. Who am I taking it to and where is he?" asked Austin.

"His name is Xeltan. He's an Elcor diplomat. He's over in the embassies complaining about Sha'ira." Septimus replied. "Well. Here's to soldiers acting like Soldiers. Thanks, know… you might make a good General yourself one day." With that, Septimus left Chora's Den. Austin then noticed the other person he'd come in here for. Rita's sister, Jenna.

"Hi! I'll be with you in just a sec." she said.

"I'll wait right here then." Austin said. He was in no rush, plus, he was a patient man.

"Why do I get the feeling you're no here for drinks?" Jenna asked.

"I need to talk to you about your work with C-sec." Austin replied. He made sure to keep his voice down.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Now, if you don't mind I need to get back to my customers." Said Jenna.

"This isn't a game, Jenna. These people are dangerous." Austin objected.

"Now you sound like my sister." Jenna replied angrily. "Why is everyone so concerned about me? I can take care of myself. I need to go. I'm not a stripper. I don't get paid to stand around and look pretty."

"Charming." Austin thought. "I guess I can't convince her. I'll have to tell her sister."

As he was making his way out of the bar however a Turian bumped into him and then whispered to him.

"If you've got questions about Jenna, meet me at C-sec academy." He whispered.

"What did you just say?" Austin asked.

The Turian however pushed him away. "Push off! I never did nothing to you. Damn newcomers. Think they can run the place." He said before he then walked off.

Austin activated his omni tool and played back the recording of the Turian in his helmet.

"I'll have to look into this. But later, I've got an Elcor diplomat to talk to first." He thought to himself.
Austin quickly returned to the presidium and soon found himself in the right embassy that he needed. In the room, were two Elcors and a Volus. Austin walked up to the one called Xeltan.

"Hello there, human. Sincere apology, but I am here on business and cannot be distracted now." Said Xeltan in a very, very deep voice.

"Don't worry, that's why I'm here. I've come to talk to you about your little problem." Austin said.

"Curious, what do you know about the Consort and her relationship to me?" Xeltan asked.

"Septimus revealed your secrets. Not her." Austin replied.

"Unbelieving, I now this Septimus and he could not learn my secret. The only way he could learn them is from the Asari Consort." Said Xeltan.

"You've got it all wrong. This should be proof enough for you." Said Austin as he handed Xeltan the datapad that Septimus had given him.

"Confused, this is difficult to fathom. If the Turian could learn this on his own… dismayed, anyone can discover my secret." Said Xeltan.

"Don't panic, Xeltan. Septimus is a powerful man and it wasn't easy for him to find." Said Austin reassuringly.

"Relieved." Said Xeltan. "I suppose you are correct, human. Thank you for this realization, I must speak with the Consort. She will be most displeased with my actions. Anxious request, please, human, if you'll excuse me, I must go now."

"I'm sure she'll forgive you. It was an honest mistake." Said Austin.

"Doubtful, perhaps you are right, human. I can only hope so." Said Xeltan as he left the other Elcor then spoke up.

"Thankful, that was a great thing you did, Commander." He said. He then turned to the Volus. "Approving, you see, Din, not all humans are as you say."

Austin nodded to the Elcor and then left the Embassies to head back to Sha'ira.

There we go. Should warn you in advance that i've decided to make things more interesting in the next chapter. I did after all say that the fic is rated M for sex, so I might as well take advantage of that. The next chapter will contain sex with Sha'ira. It'll only be a one off thing though and it won't affect Shepard's future relationship with Liara. Their relationship will be actual love, the one with Sha'ira is just for stress relief, and maybe fun.

Would also like to say that there will be several side missions in my story since some are important in future stories. In Mass Effect 3 for example Jenna saves Conrad Venrer so her mission is in here. So be prepared for some chapters to separate from the main plot of tracking down Saren.

Anyway, hope you enjoyed this chapter and hope you look forward to the next chapter. I'm already half finished so it may even be up the next day. We'll just have to see how it goes. See ya!
Chapter 6, Where do we Begin?

Right. Okay. Here it is. The Sex chapter. I'll warn you now that this one is way more graphic (and erotic) than the one I had back in Chapter 1. So be warned and don't say I didn't warn you, i've let plenty warnings that there will be sex in this story.

I hope you do enjoy it though, it was a lot if fun for me to write. Besides, the way I see it, if your going to have an M rated story you might as well go all the way.

Anyway, please enjoy, that's what I've primarily made this for after all.

Chapter 6

Where do we Begin?

Austin re-entered the Consort chambers. Sha'ira was waiting for him. He again removed his helmet.

"Commander. I recently received a lovely note from Septimus. Thank you for speaking with him." She said. "Even the Elcor diplomat has withdrawn his campaign against me."

"Your very welcome, Consort. It was my honor to aid you." Austin replied as he bowed his head to Sha'ira.

"You're too kind, Commander. But I would not expect you help me out of the kindness of your heart." Said Sha'ira.

"I may be hard and tough on the outside. But inside I'm a very understanding person. Kind too." Said Austin. He had to admit he was now feeling in a much better mood. Doing the kind deeds for Sha'ira, Septimus and Xeltan really did give him the feeling that he had done something very good. Something that had benefited them all.

"Still, it would be rude of me not to repay you, Commander. I also have one more thing to give you, if you are interested." Said Sha'ira.

"I'd be honoured." Austin replied.

"I offer a gift of words. An affirmation of who you are, and who you will become… I see you… your armour fits as though you were born wearing it. You are a soldier through and through. Proud, solitary… alone, but it gives you strength, and in time there will come the one that will give you purpose again. It is that strength that people are drawn to. It is why you lead, and others follow, without question. You will need that leadership in the battle to may be who you are, but it is not who you will become. It only forms the basis for your future greatness. Remember these words when doubt descends, Commander." Said Sha'ira.

Austin was left puzzled. True what she had said reflected him very well. There was only one bit he didn't fully understand. The bit where she had said "in time there will come the one that will give you purpose again." Still, perhaps that was something he needed to discover for himself. He couldn't help but feel as though this reward was… odd. He would have thought the Consort would have paid him, or something like that.

"Um, thanks, I guess." He said.
Sha’ira smiled and placed her hand on his cheek.

"Close our eyes and relax, Commander." She said.

Austin did so and tried to relax a bit. Then he suddenly heard the sound of a door closing and locking behind him. He opened his eyes and turned to the sound. To his surprise Sha’ira had just closed and locked her own door and was now giving a very seductive pose.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"You didn't seriously think I would have a simple gift of words as a reward did you?" she asked in a very seductive tone. "Remember that I offer comfort as well as advice. Plus you look rather stressed, you could do with some stress relief and I know just the thing."

To Austin's utter astonishment Sha’ira then unclipped some of the fastenings on her dress and let it slide down her gorgeous body and into a heap on the floor. She now stood in front of him, completely nude. Her large breasts swayed slightly, her nipples already erect as a sign of her arousal, even her pussy was beginning to glisten slightly. She stuck her hips and made a very sexy pose for him. Clearly she'd been planning this; the fact that she hadn't been wearing anything else underneath her dress was an obvious sign of that.

"Woah." Said Austin. He really hadn't expected this. Now he knew exactly what Sha’ira was doing. Now he had two choices, he could either politely decline, or accept her little invitation to have sex with her. It was an easy decision. "I like the way you think, Sha’ira." He said as he smiled.

"Take off all that armour and meet me in the other room." The Consort said as she indicated to the other room that was joined to her chambers. "You go and get comfortable. I'll be with you momentarily." Austin said as he grinned. Sha’ira walked through the door and disappeared. Austin wasted no time.

Helldiver was never designed to be removed by hand. It was so complex due to all the various components and armour pieces that it required a special machine to remove it. However all Helldiver suits where equipped with a special system that enabled parts of the suit to retract so that the user temporarily could leave the suit. It had been designed to be used if armour needed to be removed and there weren't any machines to remove it. If a Helldiver was critically injured during a battle and needed treatment the removal system would enabled the Soldier to separate from the suit quickly and safely. In this case Austin needed to get out of his armour and there wasn't one of those machines here.

"Activate Retract system." He said to his computer. Immediately the suit obeyed small parts of his armoured chest began to move as the suit opened up. Some bits where either retracted into housings or simply moved or rotated. Even the legs opened up. Once the whole of the front section of his suit had opened up, Austin stepped out.

"Oh. So good to finally be out." He said. No he only stood in suit under mesh. It was really just a simple outfit to be worn inside the suit. It was durable enough to avoid any rubbing that would ear it away from being inside the suit, but light and thin enough so that Helldivers didn't get hot at all in them. No that it made much difference, all helldiver suits where fitted with temperature controls. Either the suit would automatically adjust the temperature to a comfortable setting, or the user could do it themselves. The primary focus of this control was to ensure maximum comfort inside the suit and being inside a large metal suit while on a dry, water less, baking planet was not comfortable. Austin then unzipped his suit mesh and pulled it off leaving him in nothing but his boxers. He decided to leave those on, for now. He walked into the other room to find the Consort already waiting for him. She was currently laid across the large double bed in a very sexy pose with her left
hand fondling one of her breasts while her other hand was rubbing her dripping pussy.

"Ah, there you are. I almost started without you." She said as she smiled seductively at him.

Austin slowly climbed onto the bed and lied in front of Sha’ira. They both smiled to one another.

"I just want you to know, Shepard. This is only a one off thing. I'm merely giving you a long sense of pleasure and helping you to relax. I don't want you to get the idea and think that we're in a relationship." She said as her hand moved slowly down to his shorts.

"You needn't worry about that. I was kind of thinking the same thing too. Still it's kind of you to offer me some stress relief in this sort of way. Not many people get to fuck the Asari Consort herself." Austin responded as he took one of Sha'ira breasts into his hand and started to squeeze it.

"Good. Now, just relax and enjoy. One hour with me and you'll have pleasure like no other." Said Sha'ira. She then threw herself on Austin and began furiously kissing him. Austin was unprepared for his but quickly eased into it and started to kiss her back, now squeezing both of her tits.

"Mmmm. Hello, what do we have here?" Said Sha'ira. Her hand had now reached into his shorts and was grasping his erection. He stiffened even more once she started to tighten her grip a bit.

"Looks like I'm not the only one happy to see you." Said Austin slyly.

"You lie down for a minute. I need to give a proper greeting." Sha’ira responded. She slowly moved her whole body down his body until she reached his crotch. She slowly pulled his boxer shorts down until his penis was completely exposed. She couldn't help but gasp slightly and then smile when she saw it. Once she'd pulled his boxers off completely she took it into her hand and started to stroke it.

"Mmmmm. You have very soft hands." Said Austin.

"I was going to make this a simple short fuck. But now though, seeing your cock this big. I think I might savour this as long as I can." Sha’ira responded before she opened her mouth and engulfed him completely.

"Oh, wow! You're even better at this than I thought." Austin moaned as he laid his head back.

Sha'ira meanwhile simply moaned and hummed while she continued to suck on the massive cock. Her moans vibrated on his shaft making him groan even louder with satisfaction. At the same time she was plunging two fingers in and out of her pussy which was now dripping very hard. Sha'ira decided to change her tactics and was now bobbing up and down freely, her tongue smashing against the far-away parts of his shaft. His entire cock filled her mouth. She had absolutely no space left, her jaw found it impossible to let more in. But she loved it. His entire juicy, long, thick cock reached the uncharted regions of her throat. It almost seemed wrong for such an angelic, flawless face to be penetrated and deep-throated by a cock.

"Awww... Yeah... Ahhh..." Shepard licked his lips as she took his eight-inch cock deeper into her mouth. While looking up at him Sha’ira lightly twisted her head as her lips stroked his thick shaft and she bobbed her head to deeply take his entire cock into her wet, warm mouth.

"Oh God... I don't think I can hold on much longer!" Austin moaned quietly as his cock jerked violently and his cum shot from the tip, straight into Sha’ira's mouth.

After picking up the very last bit of cum from his beef stick Sha’ira allowed it to pop out of her mouth and she licked her lips, panting heavily.
"Goddess! That bad boy is going inside my cunt! That's an order!" she said as she slowly got her breath back.

"Not yet I think." Said Austin. "Think I should return the favour first."

He grabbed the Consort, flipped her over and pinned her to the bed. He then focused his attention on her massive bust and began to suck on them.

"Oh Shepard!" Sha'ira cried as his tongue played with her nipples. "That's it! Suck on them! Harder!"

Austin did as he was told and continued to bite, suck and lick at her gorgeous breasts.

"You have some of the biggest and most lovely tits I've ever seen." He said as he sucked her right nipple and then allowed it to pop out of his mouth.

"You're making me wet already." Said Sha'ira.

Austin smiled enthusiastically as he made his way down to her vagina.

He slowly brought his tongue out and began to lick up all the juices she was currently oozing out slowly. Austin scrambled to keep up with the amount of sweet nectar her pussy secreted while stimulating other nerve points along Sha'ira's back with his spare hand, sending pleasurable shivers down Sha'ira's spine and pulses of sweet juices dribbling from her. It didn't take long for Sha'ira to reach her climax. "Oh Goddess, Shepard! I'm gonna cum!" Austin moved his fingers so that most of the juice jetted straight into his mouth as Sha'ira squirted. He slowly continued fingering her as he felt some of the rest of Sha'ira's sweet essence spray onto his face. Once she'd finished squirting, he started wiping off her nectar with his spare hand, his other hand still gently rubbing her to ease her down from her high, and shoved the juices hungrily into his mouth.

Sha'ira grabbed him and pulled him into another furious kiss. She could feel his still rock hard cock against her stomach.

"Ready for the main event?" she asked as she once again grasped his erection and lined it up with her pussy.

"You don't need to ask." Austin replied.

"I'm ready." Said Sha'ira as she moved her head to his ear and nibbled on it slightly before whispering into it. "Push!"

Sha'ira guided him into her wondrous folds. They moaned in unison as she hugged him tightly and he moved in deeper and deeper, all the way to the hilt. "So good." The Asari gasped quietly. She placed her hands on his buttocks and squeezed to try and push him in even stared in awe at her, her beautiful breasts swaying and bouncing, sweat slowly dripping down her flawless body. "So perfect." He whispered as he sat up and pulled an erect nipple into his mouth. He bit and sucked, licking around the areola. Wet slapping sounds came from every thrust as he constantly connected with her dripping Azure and the room was alive with shouts, moans, gasps and cries. At the same time Austin continued to play with Sha'ira's tits. He couldn't get enough of them.

"Yes! Harder! Faster! Squeeze them harder! Ahhh!" she screamed.

"I'm going as hard as I can!" Austin grunted.

Sha'ira then flipped them over so that she was on top and began to bounce up and down on him. For
a moment Austin merely stared in awe at her huge breasts bouncing up and down before she seized both of his hands and brought them up to here tits and urged him to squeeze them again.

"Fuck! You're so tight!" Austin moaned.

"All the other people I've had sex with are put to shame compared to you!" Sha'ira responded.

Sha'ira exhaled deeply and did it again. "Ahhh! We're-we're gonna cum!"

"Y-You don't have to tell me that." Shepard's head rolled around and snapped back to her face.

"Ahh, fill me Shepard, fill me!"

Austin pounded into her one last time. His toes curled and his arms wrapped around her back, pulling her in close as he came. His cock jerked and spasmed inside of her as he came, painting the inside of her walls with his cum.

"Ohhh fuck!" She gasped out, her vaginal walls contracting wildly around Austin's member, milking it for all it could. She twitched madly and broke free from his grip so that she could experience the orgasm fully.

After she finally calmed down she laughed and moved back in to kiss him. "That... Was so, fucking, incredible. Best fuck I've had for years. Thank you." Her eyes turned back to their usual colour.

"My pleasure." Austin responded as he kissed her back.

After all the hard fucking, they were both exhausted and pretty soon the both fell asleep.

Austin woke up to a very pleasurable feeling. Once he opened his eyes he could feel his cock moving between something. He looked down to see Sha'ira with her gorgeously large tits wrapped around his still erect beef stick and bouncing up and down on him.

"Good morning, Commander. She said as she moved up and down in sync with his subconscious thrusting motions, moaning at the feeling of his long hard heat pressed between her milky orbs. "Thought I'd give you a very pleasurable goodbye present from me when you woke up. It'll certainly put you in a good mood to start the day." She then took his penis again into her mouth and started to suck and lick at it.

"Nice thinking." Austin said, still a little tired from his sleep. "I'm gonna cum already!"

Sha'ira kept her head tilted down and closed her eyes, feeling Austin's dick pulse between her breasts as she pointed the organ at her face, opening her mouth slightly as she felt his hot seed splash onto her face in great dollops. She shuddered and moaned as she felt fresh arousal course through her. She pulled herself up his body and nuzzled him affectionately before planting a sensuous kiss on his lips.

"If you need a shower, there's one in there." She said as she indicated back to her chambers.

"I could use one. Thanks." Austin responded.

After having cleaned himself and now full awakened now Austin came out of the shower with a towel wrapped around his waist. He was just in time to catch Sha'ira still nude before she put her dress back on.
"Thank you for that." He said. You've really put my mind at peace now. "Perhaps now I can look on the brighter side of being a spectre."

"I'm sure you'll make humanity and the Helldivers proud." Sha'ira responded. "Your armour and suit mesh are still and my quarters where you left them. I did ask one of my Acolytes to give them a wash though. I hope you don't mind."

"Not at all. That's very generous of you." Austin responded.

He walked back into the Consort's chambers to find his boxers and his suit mesh neatly folded up on a table next to where his suit still was. True to what Sha'ira had said it now looked slightly cleaner and more polished now. It glinted from the lights as he got dressed.

Finally he settled back into his suit.

"Reseal!" he ordered. His suit hummed back into life and everything slowly moved back into place. With his armour now fully resealed he picked his helmet up from the table and turned back to Sha'ira as she came out of the bedroom.

"By the way, that gift of words you gave me? Thanks for it. You have quite a gift, Sha'ira." He said.

"Thank you. Not everyone appreciates it as you do." She said.

"Only one thing I didn't understand. You said something about, a one that would give me purpose again. What did you mean by that?" Austin asked.

"You are the sort of person who needs love again, Commander. I saw some of your thoughts during the meld. You are conflicted. In time there will be someone in your life. She will provide you with the answer you seek. She will give you peace and purpose."

"Who?" Austin asked, confused.

"You have yet to meet her, Commander. But I am confident that you will know who, once you know you love her. You might think it is a simple prophecy, but never underestimate the power of words."

"After what you said, I doubt I will again." Said Austin happily.

"Here, Commander. In light of your efforts with the Elcor ambassador, I would like you to have this small trinket." Said Sha'ira as she handed Austin a trinket of some kind.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A small mystery. I have never learned its use or purpose, but I sense it is time for me to pass it on." Sha'ira answered. "And now, I must ask you to leave, I have done everything I can for you."

"Of course." Austin replied. "Thank you for everything Sha'ira. I hope we meet again one day."

"I'm sure we will. Remember my words, Commander Shepard. They will give you strength." Said Sha'ira as she planted on last kiss on Austin's lips before she turned her back to him and he placed his helmet back on.

"I will. Goodbye Sha'ira." He said as he made for the door.

"Goodbye… Austin."
As Austin neared the C-sec academy he quickly remembered something he could do here just before he headed to the docks where Udina and Anderson where waiting for him with some important news for him. The database in his suit had identified the Turian he had met earlier in the bar as Detective Chellick of C-sec. Now it made sense as to why he had mentioned Jenna. He soon found who was looking for. Chellick was sat at his desk. He quickly noticed the Commander.

"Detective Chellick. Come into my office. I want to discuss this in private." He said.

Austin approached the Turian and cleared his throat.

"No offense, Commander, but what the hell where you thinking?" Chellick asked crossly.

"Excuse me? I don't follow you." Austin replied.

"You could've blown Jenna's cover!" Chellick replied, still angry.

"I was just getting information, Chellick." Said Austin defensively.

"I gathered that. It might seem cold letting her take all the risk. But we're keeping a close eye on her." Said Chellick.

"Do you really need to risk her lifer to get the information you want?" Austin asked crossly.

"This job isn't easy and it's usually unpleasant. I'll take help anywhere I can find it. But since you're so concerned with her safety, maybe there's a way we can help each other." Said Chellick.

"Always thinking ahead, Detective?" Austin asked.

"It's part of the job. Now are you going to help me or not?" Chellick asked.

"I may be busy, but I've got time. Very well, I'll help you, but I need some details." Said Austin.

"I'm trying to track down an illegal arms producer. I just need some of their product. Thanks to Jenna's intel, I've learned there's a seller here on the Citadel." Chellick responded. "Meet our man, named Jax, pick up the mods and bring them back here. That'll give me everything I need."

"Right. Where can I find this, Jax?" Austin asked.

"Jax is down in the tower level of the markets. I'll send word through our channels that you're the buyer. Good luck, Commander." Said Chellick.

Austin had no problem doing this job. It would be simple and quick. Simply pick up the mods, bring them back to C-sec and then the business with Jenna would be sorted and he could get back to his primary mission, tracking down Saren. As he entered the lower markets of the wards he spotted Jax.

"Hold it. That's close enough." He said, as Austin approached him. You got my payment?"

"Do you have the mods?" Austin asked.

"Show him the merchandise." Jax said to his partner.

"Looks good." Said Austin.

"Damn straight it is! These mods are the best on the market. Now hand over my credits!" Jax demanded.
"Here's your money, Jax." Austin said as he handed over some credits. Chellick better pay him back for this, it wasn't cheap.

"Come on, boys. We're done here." Said Jax. He handed over the mods and he and his bodyguard walked off.

"Commander, I hear you have something for me." Said Chellick as Austin walked into his office again.

"Here's your shipment, Chellick." Said Austin as he handed over the mods.

"Excellent. This is everything I need. Hmm... maybe more than I need. Here, Commander, take this." Said Chellick as he handed Austin some credits. "I won't need it and you've earned some payment for your work. As for Jenna, I'll make sure we get her out of Chora's Den immediately. Now, I need to get these mods into evidence. Thanks again, Shepard."

With everything taken care of now, Austin headed to the Elevator that would take him to the docks where the Normandy was. As he stepped out he saw Udina and Anderson waiting outside the Normandy for him.

"I've got big news for you, Shepard. Captain Anderson is stepping down as commanding officer of the Normandy. The ship is yours now."

"She's quick and quiet and you know the crew. Perfect ship for a Spectre. Treat her well, Commander." Said Anderson.

"I'll take good care of her, sir." Said Austin.

"I know you will, Commander." Said Anderson.

"I want the truth. Why are you stepping down, sir?" Austin asked.

"You needed your own ship. A Spectre can't answer to anyone but the Council and it's time for me to step down." Anderson replied.

"I won't let you down, sir." Said Austin.

"Saren's gone. Don't even try to find him. But we know that he's after the Conduit. He's got his Geth scouring the Traverse looking for clues." Said Anderson.

"We had reports in the Feros system shortly before our colony there dropped out of there have been rumoured sightings around Noveria." Said Udina.

"Find out what Saren was after on Feros and Noveria. Maybe you can figure out where the Conduit is before he does." Said Anderson.

"You sure that's it?" asked Austin. Udina looked like he had more to say.

"We have one more lead. Matriarch Benezia, the other voice on that recording? She has a daughter, a scientist who specializes in the Protheans. We don't know if she's involved but it might be a good idea to try and find her. See what she knows. Her name's Liara. Dr. Liara T'soni. We had reports she was exploring an archaeological dig on one of the uncharted worlds in the Artemis Tau cluster." Said Udina.
"Well them, it sounds like that's where I should start." Said Austin.

"It's your decision, Commander. You're a Spectre now. You don't answer to us." Said Anderson.

"But your actions still reflect on humanity as a whole. You make a mess and I get stuck cleaning it up." Said Udina.

"That's part of your job, Ambassador! If you want the missions done in a certain way then you do them. Otherwise don't tell me how to do my damn job!" said Austin angrily.

"Not quite the answer I was hoping, Commander. Remember: you were a human long before you were a Spectre." Said Udina as he left.

"Idiot." Said Austin as he watched Udina leave. He then turned back to Anderson.

"Good luck, Shepard." Said Anderson.

"You too, Anderson." Said Austin as he shook hands with Anderson.

Austin was now backing on board the Normandy. He still hadn't removed his armour yet, he'd do that while they were on their way to the Artemis Tau cluster to find Dr. T'soni. Once they found what planet she was on he'd suit up again. For now though the Normandy first had yet to leave the Citadel.

"Thanks. That makes me feel so much better." Said Austin sarcastically. "Still, Captain Anderson should be the one in charge. It's like I'm stealing the ship from him."

"Yeah, the Captain got screwed. But it's not like you could've stopped. Nobody's blaming on this ship is behind you, Commander. On hindered percent." Said Joker. "Intercom's open. If you've got anything you want to say to the crew, now's the time."

Austin reached over to the intercom button and cleared his throat.

"This is Commander Shepard speaking." He said, his voice echoed across the entire ship. "We have our orders; find Saren before he finds the Conduit. I won't lie to you, crew. This mission isn't going to be easy. For too long our species has stood apart from the others. Though the Helldivers are different they fight, not shape interstellar policy and that's what we will prove our species is capable of and has the right to. Now it's time for us to step up and do our part for the rest of the galaxy! Time to show them what humans are made of! Our enemy know we're coming. When we go into the Traverse, Saren's followers will be waiting for us. But we'll be ready for them, too. Humanity needs to do this. Not just for our own sake, but for the sake of every other species in Citadel space. Saren must be stopped, and I promise you all...we will stop him!"

"Well said, Commander. Captain would be proud." Said Joker.

"The Captain gave up everything so I could have this chance. We can't fail." Said Austin as he left the bridge.

"Yes, sir!" said Joker.
Austin headed up to his locker in the cargo bay. Since Captain Anderson had now surrendered command of the Normandy to him he had placed a few requisition orders to the Helldivers, which had now just arrived. Now in addition to the massive Mako in the cargo bay, there was also a Helldiver Hellhound drop ship, a Helldiver suit and weapon modding station for suit and weapon customization, Helldiver ammunition and he'd even had a suit remover machine delivered to the Captain's quarters, which now belonged to him, and the cargo bay. Austin walked up to where the suit remover had been fitted. He pressed a few buttons on his Omni tool and the machine sprang into life. A portion of the floor opened up to show several robotic arms. Austin then stepped onto the indicated marked place. The robotic arms then started unscrew and remove bits of his armour. After roughly 30 seconds the Machine removed the final piece of his armour, leaving him once again his suit mesh. Another set of arms suddenly appeared and began to dress him in a traditional Alliance casual outfit. Once it had finished and he was properly dressed all the arms disappeared into the floor and the portion of the floor slotted back into place.

Austin looked around and noticed Garrus who was currently working on the Mako. Garrus noticed him and stopped his calibrations.

"Thanks for bringing me on board, Commander. I knew working with a Spectre would be better than life at C-sec." he said.

"Have you worked with a Spectre before?" Austin asked.

"Well, no. But I know what they're like." Garrus replied. "Spectres make their own rules. They're free to handle things your way. At C-sec, you're buried by rules. The damn bureaucrats are always on your back."

"For the most part, the rules are there for a reason." Said Austin.

"Maybe. But sometimes it feels like the rules are only there to stop me from doing my I'm trying to take down a suspect, it's shouldn't matter how I do it, as long as I do it. But C-sec wants it done their way. Protocol and procedure come first. That's why I left." Said Garrus.

"So you just quit because you didn't like the way they do things?" Austin asked.

"It didn't start out bad, but as I rose in ranks, I got saddled with more and more red tape. C-sec's handling of Saren was typical. I just couldn't take it anymore. I hate leaving…" said Garrus.

"I hope you made the right choice. I'd hate for you to regret it later." Said Austin.

"Well, that's sort of why I teamed up with you. It's a chance for me to get off the Citadel, see how things are done outside C-sec. Either way; I plan to make the most of this. And without C-sec headquarters looking over my shoulder, well, maybe I can get the job done my way for a change." Said Garrus.

"If getting the job done means endangering innocent people, then, no. Even in the Helldivers we get the job done right, not fast. Got it?" Austin asked sternly.

"I wasn't trying to—I understand, Commander." Said Garrus.

Garrus went back to working on the Mako while Austin went to see if he could talk with Wrex.

"Nice ship you've got, Shepard. What can I do for you?" Wrex asked.

"What's your story, Wrex?" Austin asked.
"There's no story. Go ask the Quarian if you want stories." Said Wrex.

"Come on. You Krogan live for centuries. Don't tell me you haven't had a few interesting adventures." Said Austin.

"Well, there was this one time the Turians almost wiped out our entire race. That was fun." Said Wrex, clearly sounding a bit uninterested.

"I know what you mean. You know, they almost did the same to humanity once." Said Austin.

"It's not the same." Wrex objected.

"It's seems pretty similar to me." Said Austin.

"So your people were infected with a genetic mutation?" asked Wrex. "An infection that makes only a few in a thousand children survive birth? And I suppose it's destroying your entire species?"

"Good point. I suppose it isn't the same." Said Austin.

"I don't expect you to understand, but don't compare humanity's fate with the Krogan." Said Wrex.

"Sorry, Wrex. I was just making conversation. I wasn't trying to upset you." Said Austin apologetically.

"You're ignorance doesn't upset me, Shepard. As for the Krogan, I gave up on them long Genophage infected us, but it's not what's killing us." Said Wrex.

"So long, Wrex. We can speak later." Said Austin.


Austin headed into the engine core. He was quite amazed by what he found. The main element zero core was absolutely massive. He noticed Tali was already busy working. He then saw the lead Engineer, Adams.

"Hey, Commander. You know that Quarian? Tali? She's been spending all her time down here asking me about our engines." Said Adams.

"I apologize if she's bothering you. I'll tell her to leave you alone." Said Austin

"What? No! She's amazing! I wish my guys were half as smart as she is. Give her a month on board and she'll know more about our engines than I do!" said Adams defensively. "She's got a real knack for technology, that one. I can see why you wanted her to come along."

"I figured she'd be a real asset to the team. Judging from your reaction, it looks like I was right." Said Austin.

"You've got an eye for talent, Commander. But I'm guessing that's not why you came down here." Said Adams.

"Just checking in. I'll let you get back to work. Carry on, Adams." Said Austin.

Austin then walked up to Tali. Although her face couldn't be seen because of her helmet, Austin could tell she was really enjoying herself.

"Your ship's amazing, Shepard. I've never seen a drive core like this before. I can't believe you were
able to fit it into a ship this small. I'm starting to understand why you humans have been so successful. I had no idea Alliance vessels were so advanced!” said Tali very enthusiastically.

"The Normandy's a prototype. Cutting edge technology." Said Austin.

"A month ago, I was patching a makeshift fuel line into a converted tug ship in the Migrant Fleet, now I'm sitting on board one of the most advanced vessels in Citadel space. I have to thank you again for bringing me along. Traveling on a vessel like this is a dream come true for me." Said Tali.

"I had no idea you found ship technology so interesting." Said Austin.

"It comes with being a Quarian. The Migrant Fleet is the key to the survival of my aren our most valuable resource. But we don't have anything like this. We make do with cast-offs and second-hand equipment. We just try to keep them running for as long as we of the fleets larger vessels date all the way back to our original flight from the Geth." Said Tali.

"I can't believe your fleet's still using ships that are three centuries old." Said Austin.

"They're constantly being repaired, modified, and refitted. They aren't pretty, but they. We've tried to make ourselves as independent as possible on the Flotilla. Grow our own food, mine and process our own fuel. But some things we just can't make on our own. A patch to maintain the hull integrity requires raw materials we just don't have. That's why our Pilgrimages are so important." Said Tali.

"I should go. Talk to you later. Have fun, Tali." Said Austin.

"See you later." Said Tali as she went back to her work.

Austin meanwhile headed back up to the galaxy map. It wasn't hard for him to operate; it was almost exactly the same as the one back at home on Arkadia. The only main difference was that this one was more exploration oriented, so it was more interactable.

"Joker. Plot a course for the Artemis Tau cluster. We've got an Asari doctor to find." He said.

**And there you have it. I hope you enjoyed reading this chapter as much as I enjoyed writing it. Hope also I did very well for my first full sex scene, because if I did then we can all expect the same amount of sexiness when it come round to the night before Ilos, only that one will be more romantic than this one.**

I look forward to writing Chapter 7 since that will be set on Therum. We finally meet Liara, plus as a little surprise, an old familiar face will return to face Shepard.

Please do leave reviews. I really want opinions on this particular one.
Yay! Here it is, Therum. Now we meet Liara at long last. I know a lot of you have been awaiting this so I hope you enjoy it.

Also I've read feedback and I've done my best to make this chapter more epic than it is in the game, in particular I've made the meeting with Liara are more love at first sight thing and i've swaped the Krogan at the end with a familiar face. I am also trying to make the dialouge more different to the game since some felt I should do that.

Please do enjoy.

Chapter 7

Therum

Austin stood in front of the Galaxy Map. At the moment they were still looking Dr. T' were currently in Artemis Tau cluster. Although they knew the Cluster, they still had no idea what planet she was on. It had been almost a whole day now and still nothing. Then as luck would have it, Joker's voice came over the intercom.

"Commander we've got a message coming in. I'm patching it through." He said.

"Who's she?" Austin asked.

"Just keeps saying that she's a friend and that she has the Intel you need." Said joker.

"Am I speaking to Commander Austin Shepard?" came a familiar voice through the comm.

"Yes it's me, Xun. It's been a long time. You sound well." Said Austin happily.

"As do you, old friend." Came Xun's reply. "All of Arkadia has heard about your recent admission into the Spectres. There's been a fair bit of celebrating. The Arkane Council send their regards."

"Thanks." Said Austin.

"Anyway. I got your message about searching for Doctor Liara T'soni. I've pulled up what Intel I had and I've managed to track her down. My reports say that she was last seen on the planet Therum in the Knossos system. She's exploring one of the recently discovered Prothean ruins there."

"Thank you, Xun. I appreciate this. It'll make the job a lot easier." Said Austin.

"Anything for an old friend, Shepard. Plus I owe you a few favours anyway. Good luck rescuing Doctor T'soni, wish I could do more to help. If you need any Intel, you know who to contact." Said Xun as the comm ended.

"Joker. Plot a course for Therum. I'm going to suit up." Said Austin.

As the Normandy entered Therum's atmosphere and his team where gathered in the cargo bay.

"Okay, everyone listen up. Thanks to the Intel we've received from Xun we now know exactly where Dr. T'soni is. We'll take the drop ship in for this mission, head down to the excavation site and
get T'soni out of there."

"And if there are Geth?" Wrex asked as the whole team filed into the drop ship.

"We kill anything that tries to get in our way." Austin replied.

"Now you're talking, Shepard." Wrex laughed.

"So, this is the sort of drop ship the Helldivers use?" Ashley asked as secured her seat belt.

"Yeah. I figured I'd make our job easier but getting some Helldiver tech for us." Austin replied.

"Interesting." Said Ashley. "If this where Alliance, we'd use the Mako."

"Therum's environment may be a bit too dangerous for the Mako, Williams." Said Garrus.

"This is as close as I can to the excavation site, Commander." Came Joker's voice through the comm.

"Copy that. Set us down at the entrance." Austin said to the drop ship's pilot.

There was a small bump as the drop ship unclamped from the cargo bay and flew out. The drop ship flight was short and the doors opened within minutes. Austin was the first to jump out (once again due to his Helldiver habits). Then others disembarked.

"You gonna do that a lot. Skipper?" Ashley asked.

"Force of habit." Austin replied.

From the looks of things the excavation site looked as if it had been deserted for a while. But there were no bodies, no sign of an attack. Suddenly everyone's comm flashed into life again.

"Commander! I'm reading incoming Geth!" came Joker's voice.

Right on Cue several Geth troopers and a Geth Colossus descended from the sky.

"Everyone, get to cover! Now!" Austin shouted.

Everyone immediately dove for cover behind some nearby crates. The Geth soldiers where easy to deal with but the Geth Colossus was still standing. While the team continued to fire Austin then noticed some Geth soldiers that they had missed. Unfortunately they were right at the entrance to the Prothean ruins. Before Austin could fire on them, the entrance opened and the Geth disappeared from site.

"Oh, shit! Guys, some of the Geth have made it inside!" he said to the others.

"We can handle this, Shepard. You get in there. Find Dr. T'soni!" said Ashley.

"You're sure?" Austin asked.

"We'll be fine!" said Wrex.

"Okay, cover me!" he ordered.

Austin dove out of cover and ran for the entrance. The cover fire from his comrades managed to keep the Colossus distracted long enough for him to get inside. Austin quickly descended into the dig site with his rifle at the ready.
As he continued to descend deeper however the tunnel became much darker due to the power for the lights being out and also steeper, forcing him to not move too fast. If he tripped on something and lost his footing it would not be a pleasant sight. Eventually it became far too dark for him to see. He first activated his night vision. However it didn't do much good. He then took a small flash light attachment from his combat belt and fitted it to his rifle. With a small bit of illumination now he continued down the tunnel. Unfortunately he failed to notice a small gap in the tunnel. He tripped and lost his footing.

"Shit!" he said as he continued to fall down the tunnel.

He tried to stop but there was nothing to grab onto and it was too steep now for him to regain his footing. Mercifully though the tunnel finally came to an end. He landed on his face with a very loud clang. He groaned as he slowly got up.

"Oh, blast! I'm gonna feel that in the morning." He groaned as he picked himself up.

This part of the dig sight appeared to be lit, but the power still appeared to be of the lights where even flickering on and off. However it was bright enough that Austin didn't need the flash light or his night vision anymore and he deactivated both.

"Sterile lighting. Protheans sure knew how to make a person feel as if they weren't welcome here." Austin thought.

As he descended a flight of stairs he caught a humming sound just in time to raise up his rifle in preparation. There were two at what looked like an elevator. He decided to go on the attack and threw a grenade at them. The Geth looked at it momentarily before it exploded, killing both of them in the process.

Austin activated his scanner to see if there were any more. There didn't appear to be. He moved into the elevator and pressed what looked like the down button. The elevator very slowly descended to the lower levels. He kept looking at the massive open chambers on the nearby wall he couldn't help but chuckle thinking the Protheans seemed to have liked tile designs. Still it was a very fascinating design. Although it Austin had a small fascination with Protheans and their technology he didn't show it that much. There were very little people he knew of who were also interested.

"Perhaps that's something Dr. T'soni and I share in common." Austin thought to himself.

As the elevator stopped Austin stepped out. He then saw another elevator. There was another path, but it lead straight to a dead end. It looked as though this place had seen one or two cave-ins. This cave in however looked like it had been there a very long time. It was almost as though the people working here had forgotten it. The Geth had only just arrived here so it seemed odd that the cave in hadn't cleared sooner. Austin however turned his attention back to the mission and headed for the next elevator. As it descended though it began to screech and then stopped before it had finished.

"Great. That's all I need." Said Austin annoyingly.

He walked up to the door and began to force it open. Surprisingly the door was extremely heavy, even for him. His suit gave him enhanced strength which allowed him to lift and move some objects that would normally be impossible for others. The Arkanes even had reason to believe that the suits where powerful and strong enough to give a normal human the strength of a Krogan. Austin sometimes wondered how strong Kraan was since Krogan where super strong even without suits and armour.

After a lot of effort he finally managed to force the doors open. As he stepped out he found himself
on a small walkway. He looked down and noticed that one of these chambers on the level below him was protected by what looked like a biotic field. The end of the walkway was destroyed so there was no clear way down. Austin shrugged his shoulders and sighed. He climbed over the edge of the railing and landed with a large clang on the level below he heard a voice.

"Uh… hello? Could somebody help me? Please?" said the voice.

Austin immediately snapped to attention and pulled out his SMG. He looked around but couldn't see anyone.

"Hello?" said the voice again. Austin slowly turned around and found the source of the was immediately taken by surprise.

Inside the chamber wasn't just an empty tile filled room but in this room there was the most beautiful Asari he had ever seen floating in the centre of the chamber. His mouth was caught open and he had to remind himself how to form coherent sentences. She was dressed in a rather tight fitting green science uniform. She didn't look that old compared to other Asari he had met. From the sound of her voice and how beautiful she looked, Austin guessed she was probably only around roughly 90 years old. The blue beauty began calling out again in a sweet frightened voice.

"Can you hear me out there? I'm trapped. I need help!" she said.

"It's alright, I can hear you." Austin replied. "Are you alright in there?"

"I'm fine. Just a bit frightened. Who are you? What are you doing here?" the Asari asked again.

"Commander Austin Shepard of the Helldivers. You're Dr. Liara T'soni, I presume?" Austin asked.

"Yes, I am. Thank the goddess. I didn't think anyone would come looking for me." Said Liara." This thing I am in is a Prothean security device. I cannot move, so I need you to get me out of it."

"Don't worry, Miss T'soni. I promise I'll get you out of here in no time." Said Austin reassuringly. Despite her position Liara couldn't help smiling what was it about this human that put her at such ease , she knew such little about humans but this one man had already made her want to learn more about their culture.

Austin tried to approach her but he couldn't seem to get past the barrier. He even tried his Omni blade, but even that didn't work.

"There's some sort of barrier in the way. I can't get past it. How'd you even end up in there in the first place?" He asked Liara.

"I was exploring these ruins when I suddenly heard a massive explosion. Before I knew what was happening, a small squad of Geth showed up. I fought them off as best as I could with my biotics but in the end there was too many of them. So I hid in here. Can you believe that? Geth! Beyond the veil!"

"Trust me, T'soni. My comrades and I thought the exact same thing. You're not alone." Said Austin.

"I activated the tower's defences. I knew the barrier curtains would keep them out. But it seems I also hit something that I wasn't supposed to, next thing I knew I was suspended in the air like this and unable to move. Please, you have to get me out." Liara pleaded.

"Just calm down, Liara." Austin said reassuringly. "I'll find some way to help you. It's just getting
past this barrier that's the problem.

He looked around activated many of his masks other visions to try and see if there was anyway of deactivating the barrier. But there was nothing, he couldn't even see where the barriers power was coming from.

"The controls to my prison field are in here. If you can get past the curtain you can free me." Said Liara.

"There must be some way." Said Austin.

"Please, be careful, Commander. When the Geth attacked they were being led a different Geth. It was much larger than the others, and also much scarier. They've been trying different ways to get in." said Liara.

Austin then looked behind him and saw what looked like some sort of large cylinder.

"Hold on. I see something that might help. Just stay calm, I'll be back. I promise." He said to Liara.

"Take your time. It's like I can go anywhere." Said Liara.

Austin moved over to the cylinder. On closer inspection he saw that it was in fact a mining laser.

"Perfect." He thought. "This'll do the trick."

He pulled a panel off of the mining laser and activated his omni tool. The mechanism was difficult but it took several attempts before the laser kicked into life and activated. Almost immediately a large laser shot out of the cylinder and melted right through the rock under Liara's barrier in seconds. Austin proceeded through until he found himself on what looked like an elevator.

Liara hung her head she had felt so secure only moments ago when the human man had assured her that would be fine but her insecurities about her situation began to eat away at her. What could he possibly do that would get him inside here? It wasn't until she heard footsteps and saw the same Commander walk into the chamber from behind her that her expression changed from depression to amazement.

"But... but how did you find a way in here? I didn't think there was any way past that barrier." she asked.

"I blasted through with a mining laser." Austin replied as he smiled warmly at her.

"Oh, of course. That makes sense." She said.

She was relieved this was real and not something she'd imagined. After a second Shepard made his way to the console, clicking a few buttons. Liara immediately felt gravity returning to her and knew there was nothing to stop the abrupt landing, however instead of the hard tile she'd expected to feel herself connect with she, felt herself in two strong protective arms.

"Don't worry. I've got you." Said Austin as he caught her in his arms and slowly knelt down to put her gently on the ground.

"Th... thank you again, Commander" she stuttered.

"You're welcome, Liara." Austin responded. "And please, call me Austin or Shepard. Only soldiers use my last name."
"Of course, Com- I mean, Shepard." Liara corrected herself looking down and blushing.

"Here, have this. It's water. You look like you could really some." Said Austin as he detached his water flask from his combat belt and handed it to Liara.

"Thank you." Said Liara. "That feels so good."

To her surprise he then took her face into his hands and seemed to look at her closely.

"Good. No injuries. No signs of trauma either." He said. "You sure you're okay?"

"I'm fine. I don't think I can walk though. My legs are just too weak. I'm sorry." Said Liara.

"That's no problem. I'll just have to carry you out." Said Austin reassuringly.

Suddenly his comm beeped.

"Shepard, its Kaiden. We've dealt with all the Geth outside the dig site. We're watching the entrance. Do you need help down there?" Kaiden asked through the radio.

"No need. I have Dr. T'soni with me. I'm heading back up top. We'll rendezvous at the entrance." Austin said.

He picked up his helmet and fastened it back on. Then he scooped Liara up.

"I am sorry Shepard for this inconvenience; I don't think I can walk just yet." Said Liara, blushing again as she wrapped her hands around Austin's neck for stability.

"It's alright Liara; it is not every day that I get to carry beautiful asari such as you around." Austin said, immediately thinking to himself. "Did I just say that out loud?" Liara's face was now purple in colour, she didn't say anything just smiled and tried to turn her eyes away from Shepard's helmet.

As they made their way to the main elevator that would take them back to the entrance the whole place began to shake slightly.

"That doesn't sound good." Said Austin as he placed Liara on the floor of the elevator so that he could access the controls.

"These ruins are unstable. That mining laser must have triggered a seismic event. We need to get out of here, fast." Said Liara.

"No argument there." Austin said to Liara. He then activated his communicator again. "Joker, the whole place is coming down! Get the Normandy airborne and lock on in on my signal, on the double mister!" he ordered.

"Aye, aye, Commander." Came Joker's reply.

"He needs to move fast." Said Liara.

"He'd better. Because if we both die in here, I'm gonna kill him!" Said Austin. However he saw Liara's shocked expression. "Not literally of course. Just a figure of speech." He said reassuringly.

Austin picked Liara up again and waited for the elevator to stop. When it did however they were both greeted by a very unwelcome sight. Four Geth troopers where advancing towards them and with them was a face that Austin recognized all too well. It was the Terror slowly put Liara down on her feet.
"Get behind me." He told her.

Liara did as she was told and moved behind the Helldiver. Austin turned his attention back to the Terror Geth.

"You again." He said. "Back for more are we? What's the matter? Didn't have enough last time?"

The Terror Geth growled at Austin. Then to both Austin and Liara's horror, it spoke.

"Shepard." It said slowly in a very deep groaning voice.

Austin had heard a lot of scary noises in his time but the Terror Geth's voice was something else. He quickly regained his composure.

"You speak? Funny. I thought Geth where just mindless robots." He said.

"You presume much. But yet you know so little," Said the Terror Geth. "You know why we are here, human. You should know what happens next."

"This isn't really the best time for us to fight it out, you know. In case you didn't notice, this whole place is going to come down on our head any second." Said Austin.

"That is of little concern to us." Said the Terror Geth. "You have proven useful in disabling the energy fields, but now you have served your usefulness to us. Hand over the Asari, and we will consider sparing your life." It ordered as it pointed its plasma blaster at Austin.

"Whatever it is you want, you are not getting it from me!" said Liara bravely.

"You heard the lady. She'll stay with me, thanks." Said Austin.

"That is not an option for you human. Saren wants her, our gods want her, and we will never disappoint them." Said the Terror Geth angrily.

Austin was slightly nervous. There were five of them and only two of them. Plus the Terror Geth was probably equal to three Geth alone and Liara was not in a good condition to fight and she didn't have any armour or weapons. The odds were not in his favour. Plus one Geth alone could do real damage to him. The Geth used lasers, which his suit was not designed his shields wouldn't last long either, and with The Terror Geth it was impossible for him to survive a direct hit from its plasma blaster. Then Liara suddenly whispered something to him.

"Throw me into the air." She said.

"What?" Austin asked.

"Throw me into air. Trust me. I can help even the odds for you. I know what I'm doing." Said Liara.

The Terror Geth turned to its soldiers. "Destroy the Helldiver! But do not harm the Asari, Saren want her alive!" it ordered.

"Now!" said Liara.

Austin immediately grabbed Liara and threw her into the air. As he did she charged up all of her biotic strength. Once she had gone as high as she could she unleashed it in a single massive biotic explosion. The four Geth troopers where completely obliterated by the biotic but the Terror Geth was smart. It activated some kind of omni shield and the blast didn't affect it. Liara gently floated back down to ground and Austin caught her. He knew now what to placed Liara behind the elevator.
"Stay here." He said.

The Terror Geth deactivated its shield.

"I am smarter than you think, Shepard. I learn from my mistakes and can evolve my strategies. Can you?" it asked.

"As a matter of fact I can." Said Austin.

He took a small EMP grenade from his belt and threw it at the Terror Geth's plasma plaster. It exploded on impact and the Terror Geth's weapon malfunctioned.

"A smart tactic, Shepard. But you will still fall. We will settle this, as you humans say, the old-fashioned way." It said as it unclipped the weapon and let it fall away.

Austin readied himself for a fight.

"It's just you and me then." He said.

"No, it's just me, Shepard!" the Terror Geth roared as it charged at him but he was ready for two opponents wrestled with one another. The Terror Geth tried to push Austin back but instead, and too Liara's amazement Austin ended pushing the Terror Geth back.

"You're strength is impressive, human. But you're form is fragile." Said the Terror Geth intimidatingly.

"You don't frighten me. You're just a machine, and machines can be broken!" Austin retaliated as he grabbed the Terror Geth and flung it over his head. He unholstered his SMG and tried to shoot at the Geth but it activated its omni shield again. The projectiles merely bounced off.

Liara still continued to merely watch as the Helldiver and Terror Geth fought hand to hand with one another. Both had equal amounts of strength but Austin had better agility and was smaller than his opponent. This made it slightly harder for the Terror Geth to land every strike. Unlike Austin however the Terror Geth was not affected by pain or endurance and it had more force in its punches. Liara wished she could do something, but the biotic charge she had unleashed on the Terror Geth's soldiers had zapped all of the strength out of her. She was too weak to use her biotics again. All she could do was watch as the two opponents fought. She was amazed though by Austin's bravery to wrestle the Terror Geth. She had heard some stories about Helldivers but hadn't been sure whether to believe them or not. Now though, seeing this Helldiver fight a mutated Geth Prime hand to hand, she had a very different opinion.

Austin managed to land a critical hit on the Terror Geth's head which dislodged one of its mechanical face flaps and break one of its horns. The Terror Geth however counterattacked with a swift punch to Austin helmet, knocking him back. This left Austin temporarily disoriented and the Terror Geth saw this as an opening, it charged at him at full speed.

"Shepard!" Liara yelled.

Austin just managed to get his focus back and turned back to Liara, only too late did he notice the Terror Geth charge at him. The machine caught him and charged him right into the was a small explosion of bricks and dust.

"No!" Liara cried.
She saw the Terror Geth move slightly and then surprisingly and went limp and fell. Then she saw why. Austin must have managed to get his omni blade out just as the Terror Geth charge him and had managed to stab the Geth in the chest. He tried to move but it looked as though he was stuck in the hole that the Terror Geth's charge had caused.

"Liara, I'm stuck. Can you help?" he asked.

Liara summoned up all the strength she could manage and hauled herself to her feet. She moved slowly over to Austin and managed to pull him free of the wall.

"Thanks, Liara. Now let's get you out of here." He said as he picked her up again.

"That was simply incredible, Commander!" Said Liara. "You fought a super powered Geth Prime hand to hand, on your own!"

"You can congratulate me fully once we're on the Normandy," Austin replied. As the neared the tunnel the whole place shook again, this time more violently and rocks started to fall from the ceiling.

"Hold on tight!" he said to Liara as he ran for it. Liara immediately obliged and clung tightly to Austin as he carried her out. For a moment everything went pitch black and she couldn't see and then, sunlight. They had cleared the dig site. In the distance Liara could see a ship coming to land.

"That was way to close." Said Austin as he took a moment to get his breath back.

The Normandy touched down quickly and the cargo bay doors opened, the rest of his team where waiting for him.

"Commander, quickly, the lava is overflowing!" Garrus shouted.

Austin immediately hurried into the Normandy and the Cargo bay doors sealed.

As the Normandy flew off the dig site began to collapse. Once it had stopped, all was suddenly a large robotic hand burst out of the rubble. With it followed the damaged, but functional body of the Terror Geth. Like it had said, it learned from its mistakes. It would take more than a simple omni blade wound to defeat this Geth. The Terror Geth's chest had large hole in it from where the blade had stabbed it. It watched the Normandy leave the atmosphere of Therum. This was far from over. It knew that it and Shepard would meet again and when they did it would not lose to the human.

"Run, Shepard. Run. You have only prolonged the inevitable. We will meet again. You cannot stop us. The Old Machines will return!" it spoke.

"Too close, Commander. Ten more seconds and we would've been swimming in molten sulphur. The Normandy isn't equipped to land in exploding volcanoes. They tend to fry our sensors and melt our hull. Just for future reference." Said Joker over the intercom.

They had all gathered in comm room. Everyone except Austin was seated.

"We almost died out there and your pilot is making jokes?" Liara asked, sounding slightly appalled.

"Sometimes Joker's a real arse. Just try to ignore him." Austin replied with a shrug.

"I see. It must be a human thing. I don't have a lot of experience with humans. But I am more than grateful to you. You saved my life back there." Said Liara.
"What did Saren want with you? Do you know anything about the Conduit?" asked Kaiden.

"I'm afraid I know very little. I've heard of it a few times but I'm afraid I have no idea what it is. All I do know was that it was somehow connected to the extinction of the Protheans. That is my real area of expertise. I've spent the past fifty years learning all there is to know about them." Liara replied.

"How old are you, exactly?" Kaiden asked.

"I hate to admit it, but I am only 106." Liara replied.

"Damn! I hope I look that good when I'm your age." Said Ashley.

"That may seem like a long time to us, Ash. But by the standards of her own people she's still considered a child. Err… no offense." Austin quickly said to Liara.

Liara was surprised by Austin's knowledge of her people. "None taken, Commander. I would have used the same sort of words. Yes, I still barely considered more than a child." She said.

"I'm guessing that does cause some problems? If you're that young then I can't imagine other Asari are the best listeners to you?" Austin asked. "Again, no offense."

"None taken. You are correct. Because of my age, my research hasn't received the attention it deserves. My theories on the Protheans are often dismissed because of it." Liara replied. Once again she was surprised by Austin's knowledge on Asari. Plus he seemed to describe it in the same sort of manner that she would, it was almost as if he could read her mind.

"I've got my own theory about why the Protheans disappeared." Said Austin.

"With all due respect, Commander, I mean no offense but I have heard every theory out problem is the lack of evidence to support them. The is remarkably very little that the Protheans left behind." Said Liara.

"Some of us believe that they may have been wiped out by a race of sentient machine. The Reapers." Said Austin.

"The Reapers? But I have never heard of—what evidence do you have for this, Commander?" Liara asked.

"We found a damaged Prothean beacon on Eden Prime. It burned some sort of vision into my mind. Even with my suit's systems I still can't make any sense of it. But it certainly seems to show the Reapers exterminating the Protheans." Austin replied.

"A beacon? Yes, of course. That makes sense. Prothean beacons where designed to transmit and imprint information directly into the minds of their users. However finding one today that works is extremely rare. No wonder the Geth attacked Eden Prime. A working Prothean beacon in this day and age is worth almost any risk." Said Liara. "However the beacons where only designed with Protheans brains in mind. That is why the information you received does not make any sense to you. But I am amazed you were able to make sense of it at all. A lesser mind would've been unable to handle all this. You must be remarkable strong willed, Shepard."

Somehow, Austin found that compliment rather flattering. He was glad at this point he wasn't' wearing a helmet since he worried he might be blushing. He hadn't done that for years.

"This isn't helping us find Saren or the Conduit." Kaiden interrupted.
"I'm sorry. My scientific curiosity got the better of me. I really do wish I had more information for you. But I honestly don't know anything." Said Liara.

"I don't know why Saren wanted you out of the picture. But I think we can benefit heavily from having you with us." Said Austin.

Liara was even more surprised. He wanted her to stay.

"Thank you, Shepard. I cannot think of anywhere more safer than here with you on this my knowledge of the Protheans; I'm sure will prove useful later on." Said Liara.

"And your biotics will make you a formidable ally for us in battle. Welcome aboard, Liara. It's good to have you on the team." Said Austin.


"You haven't eaten or slept for a long time. Dr. Chakwas should take a look at you." Said Austin.

"I'm sure it is just mental exhaustion, Commander. I need to process everything that's happened. Still, it wouldn't hurt to be examined by a medical professional." Said Liara.

"Okay. Everyone dismissed. Liara, I'll show you to the med bay." Said Austin as everyone left the comm room.

"Commander, the mission reports are filled. You want me to patch you to the Council?" Joker asked through the comm.

"Right, on second thoughts, Liara, just wait a minute while I talk with the Council." Said Austin to Liara. Liara nodded and sat down on the furthest chair. "Path them through, Joker." Said Austin.

"Setting link up now, Commander." Said Joker.

The three orange, holographic images of the Council appeared before Austin.

"Well done for your work on Therum, Commander. I understand Dr. T'soni has joined your team." Said the Asari councillor.

"I assume you're taking the necessary security precautions?" asked the Turian councillor.

"Don't tell me how to do my job!" said Austin annoyedly.

"You are free to act as you see fit, Commander. Our role is to offer Council and advice." Said the Asari councillor.

"Well, questioning whether I know what I'm doing isn't what I would call advice." Said Austin.

"It's up to you to decide if you're smart enough to use that advice." Said the Turian councillor.

"Well, give me actual advice and maybe I'll use it. Anyway, security precautions are unnecessary, Liara's on our side. The Geth were trying to kill her." Said Austin.

"Benezia would never allow Saren to kill her own daughter." Said the Asari councillor.

"Maybe she doesn't know." Said the Salarian councillor.

"Or maybe we don't know her. We never expected she could become a traitor." Said the Turian
"At least the mission was a success." Said the Salarian councillor.

"Apart from the utter destruction of a major Prothean ruin. Was that really necessary, Shepard?" the Turian councillor asked crossly.

"If you want the mission done in a certain way, then maybe you should do it. Otherwise don't lecture me on how I handle missions! Besides, the mission always takes priority; I would've thought you of all people would know that." Said Austin smugly.

"The Commander is right. Getting Dr. T'soni out was the main objective." The Salarian councillor backed him up.

"Good luck, Commander. We will be waiting for your next report." Said the Asari councillors the transmission ended and the holograms disappeared. Austin turned back to Liara.

"Now, I believe I was showing you to the med bay?" he asked.

"Yes you where, Shepard." Liara answered.

Austin offered her his hand and she took it.

"Probably best I don't carry you this time. If the crew see me carrying a beautiful, young Asari through the CIC they might get the wrong idea." Austin laughed. Liara giggled slightly.

Austin led her through the CIC, down the stairs to the second level and into the med bay.

"The med bay is just through there." He indicated to Liara. "I'll check on you later. In the mean time I have some things I need to take care of and I need to get out of this armour."

Liara nodded. "I understand, Shepard. I will see you later. Thank you for all your help." She said.

For a moment the two stared into each other's eyes.

"You're welcome, Liara. Let me know if you need anything." Said Austin as he stepped into the elevator.

"How is she, Karen?" Austin asked.

Having removed his armour now, Austin had returned to the med bay to check on Liara as he had promised.

"She'll be fine, Shepard. She just needs to regain her strength. You okay?" Dr. Chakwas asked.

"Just a few minor scrapes and bruises. Nothing bad." Austin replied.

Austin walked into the extra bit of the med bay where Liara had decided to take up residence. She noticed him come in. Finally she saw him without his armor for the first time. For some reason she couldn't take her eyes off of his face. She couldn't deny how handsome she found him. The long hair, the short beard... Even his British accented voice was enough to make her relax and feel safe. She didn't understand it. She had never felt this way about someone before when she had first met them.

"Shepard. Are you here to check up on me?" she asked.
"You look much better. The colour seems to have returned to you as well. You look even bluer than before." Austin replied.

Liara couldn't help but blush slightly.

"He's such a charmer." She thought.

"I see you wasted no time in getting settled in." said Austin as he looked around at how Liara had rearranged some of the boxes.

"Since I am going to be serving with you, I felt it best to get comfortable. I never properly thanked you for saving me from the Geth, Shepard. You have my gratitude." Said Liara.

"You've nothing to thank me for, Liara. In fact I should be thanking you. If you hadn't used your biotics against those Geth, we might not even be here. So really you're the hero here, not me." Said Austin.

Liara didn't know what to say. She'd never had someone call her a hero.

"Why, thank you, Shepard." She said, blushing slightly. "I'm also surprised you seem to trust me so much. I have seen the way the rest of you crew looks at me. They do not seem to trust me as you do."

"If you were with Saren then the Geth wouldn't be trying to kill you. Plus if you were an assassin you would have made an attempt on my life by now. But I refuse to believe you're lying, you seem to sweet and innocent for that." Said Austin as he smiled at Liara.

Liara chuckled and smiled back at him.

"You're too kind, Shepard." She said.

"If I may ask, how is it that you knew a lot about Asari lifestyle?" she asked.

"Helldivers are trained to work with and understand the species that they work and fight this case there are plenty of Asari in the Helldivers, so that's kinda how I knew."

"Tell me a bit about yourself, Liara." Said Austin.

"Me? I really doubt you'd be interested in someone like me, Shepard. I'm not what you would call a very sociable person. I've spent a lot of my life alone on remote digs examining Prothean ruins."

"That at least explains why there was no one else on Therum." Said Austin. "Why is it you prefer to be on your own?"

"I guess it came from being the daughter of a Matriarch. When I was much younger, people expected me to follow in the footsteps of my mother. Matriarchs guide their followers into the future; they seek the truth of what is to come. Perhaps that is why I became more interested in studying the secrets of the past. It sounds foolish when I say it like that. I make it sound like I became an archaeologist merely to rebel against Benezia."

"It's not foolish. All children rebel against their parents one day. It's part of growing up." Said Austin.

"You share the wisdom of a Matriarch, Shepard. Benezia said the same thing when I told her of my decision." Liara chuckled. "But there was more to it than that. I felt drawn to the Protheans were
these wondrous, mysterious figures. I wanted to know everything about them."

Austin chuckled slightly. "You remind me of myself at a very young age. When I was around 10 years old I had the same sort of interest in Protheans. Today I still have it, though it's nowhere near as close as your interest is." He said.

"That is why I find you so fascinating, Shepard. You were marked by actual Prothean technology." Said Liara.

"Oh, you find me fascinating do you?" Austin asked slyly. "Ha, it sounds like you want to dissect me in a lab."

Liara laughed.

"You are funny, Shepard. Though I admit, I wouldn't mind learning more about you." she said.

"Indeed. But we'll have to continue this another time. Hate to do this, but I have things to take care of. Good to see at least your better. I'll see you later, Liara." Said Austin as he turned to leave.

"Goodbye, Shepard." Liara responded.

"And please, Liara, call me Austin."

"Okay… Austin."

__________

And there you have it. The start of their relationship. You can expect them to flirt a lot more with each other throughout the story as I've made Liara just a tiny bit more used to teasing.

Also i now have a proper picture of the Terror Geth up on Deviantart. Hope the design is good. Just go onto Deviantart and type Terror Geth into the search. It should come up.

Hope you enjoyed the changes I made to the story and hope you look forward to more like this.

I'm also happy to report that chapter 8 will be the one that some fans have been waiting for. Some reviews I've had want to know more about the history and backgrounds of the Arkanes and the Helldivers. Well I'm pleased to say that it will be in that chapter that Liara looks into Shepard's background and ends up finding out everything about how the Arkanes first came into contact with the other races and how the Helldivers have become so powerful.

Keep up those reviews.
Chapter 8, The History of the Helldivers

Okay. Here's the chapter that I'm certain will answer a lot of questions that some of you might have about the Arkanes and the Helldivers.

Nothing more for me to say other than, please enjoy.

Chapter 8

The History of the Helldivers

Liara sat at her terminal still debating on whether she should do it or not. Ever since she had met Austin she couldn't stop thinking about him. She admitted that his connection to the Protheans was mostly why she was so fascinated with him. But she couldn't deny that there was another side to it. She wanted to know more about this Helldiver, to understand what made him the handsome young man he was today. What? Again, she thought he was handsome? What was the matter with her? Eventually, Liara made up her mind. She logged onto the extranet and typed in, Commander Austin Shepard.

To Liara's surprise there were quite a few interesting news reports. The first one she saw said "First Alliance Marine to become Helldiver!" Liara scrolled over to it and clicked. The article explained how Shepard had been celebrated as the first Helldiver to originally start off in the Alliance. It had been a huge achievement back then since at the time all human Helldivers had just joined straight away and hadn't originally began training in a different place. However the article didn't say much about his origins, where he came from, who his parents where.

Another article then caught her eye. It said "Alliance massacre!" at first Liara didn't see how it was related to Shepard but then she saw his name in the tags, so she clicked on the link. She was shocked by what she read. On the planet Akuse a squad of Alliance marines had originally been stationed there for training when they had suddenly been attacked by a Thresher Maw. Only one had survived and to Liara utter shock, it was Shepard. From what the report said Shepard had even managed to kill the Maw. The report then went on to say that a squad of Helldivers had provided aid by firing on the Maw from the air. They had seen Shepard's heroism and skill in defeating the Maw and after hours of searching they had managed to find and rescue him and return him to the Alliance brass. Then the report went on to say that the incident was known today for being the very thing that first got Shepard into the Helldivers since the Arkanes recognized his skill.

Liara was speechless. To even think what he had endured there, and not just physically. He had seen his whole unit die there. It was remarkable that he had managed to endure this and still come out sane. Anyone else could have been driven mad by that experience.

Liara then spotted an article that had a Helldiver picture with it. It once again had Shepard's name in the tags. The title read "Hero of Elysium!" Liara clicked on it. A large picture showed up of a Helldiver being interviewed by several journalists. It didn't look like Shepard though. His armour was different. He had N stripe on his arm or an N7 logo on his chest and parts of his armour where a desert colour rather than the plain grey that Shepard had. He did however have a sword on his back and also the exact same bulky shoulder plate on his left shoulder that Shepard had.

Liara read the article further and then understood. The report explained how Elysium had been attacked by Batarian slavers during the Skyllian Blitz. At the time only Shepard had been stationed there to try and improve Alliance relationships with the Helldivers. When the attack had occurred he
had Shepard rallied a resistance force and managed to single-handedly repulse the enemy ground force long enough for Alliance and Helldiver reinforcements to arrive. For his heroism he had been awarded the Star of Terra and membership in the N7 program by the Alliance. This explained why the Shepard in the picture did not have the same armour. The report then also said that Shepard had also received acclaim from the Helldivers and the Arkanes by being promoted to Commander and being given command of his own squad, which the report seemed to state would later become the legendary Alpha Squad who was now known today as Helldiver legends.

Liara's tone now changed from shock to amazement. She had never had any doubts that the Commander was capable of much; after all she had watched him fight the Terror Geth hand to hand all by himself. But she had never expected something like this. She spotted one more article which said "Alpha Squad. The Heroes of the Helldivers!" Liara clicked on it.

The article first explained about Alpha Squad in general. They were a multi species squad led by Shepard. The squad consisted of a Krogan, an Asari, a Turian, a Quarian and two other humans. Today Alpha Squad where well known among the Helldivers as being one of the best of the best. The report even had a brief line spoken by Shepard in an interview. In that interview he had said "They say we get some of the best assignments. That is very true, but unfortunately that does mean that sometimes, we get the worst."

The article explained about how Batarians pirates and slavers had somehow managed to acquire a massive dreadnought of unimaginable power. The Batarians used it to attack several human colonies and even to target Earth. This plan however was thwarted multiple times by the brave attempts of Alpha Squad who engaged the Batarians on multiple colonies and managing to drive them back. Only one world was lost to the Batarians, Horizon. Since then however it had been retaken and the human colony there was slowly rebuilding. After the loss of Horizon however, Alpha Squad took the fight to the Batarians and engaged them in a game of cat and mouse across the entire Traverse before the two enemies unexpectedly found themselves in the grasp of a black hole. Alpha Squad barely managed to escape by activating their Mass Effect core and retreating out of the black holes reach. The Batarians on the other hand had been unable to, since their Mass Effect core had been damaged during one of the dog fights and was unable to perform a jump. Alpha Squad had commented that they did offer assistance to the Batarians but they refused. So Alpha Squad had watched as the massive dreadnought was pulled into the black hole and destroyed. For their heroism Alpha Squad had all been awarded with the Cross of Glory, one of the highest rewards that the Arkanes and the Helldivers could bestow. With the story was a picture of Alpha Squad. Liara recognized Shepard immediately. In this photo he now had the same armour that he wore today.

Other than the reports she had just read, Liara couldn't seem to find anything more on Shepard. The reports did however mention about his family. He had a sister in the Alliance who had recently been accepted into the N7 program, his mother was an Admiral in the Alliance navy and his father was a Helldiver General. Other than that though there was little else about Shepard.

Then Liara spotted something interesting that said "The Idiot's guide to the Helldivers." Liara decided it would be a good idea to have a look at this. If she was going to be serving and fighting alongside a Helldiver it would probably be wise to learn more about them.

Thousands of years ago the Arkanes discovered highly advanced technology on their home world. At first the Arkanes believed that the technology was Prothean. However the Arkanes had long since discovered Prothean technology and when they compared the new technology to the Prothean tech they had found they discovered that technology was completely different. Some Arkanes even came to believe that it may have been older even than the Protheans.
Since the Arkanes already had a vast knowledge of science and technology they were quickly able to jump their current technology forward by almost one thousand years by developing more efficient machinery, advanced robotics, highly advanced weaponry and even their greatest creation, the Helldivers.

When the Helldivers had first been created they the Arkanes had still not made contact with other races. Therefore the very first Helldivers had been Arkanes. The Helldivers had first been designed with the sole purpose of serving as the Arkanes military force. After many years, sometime after the Asari had first mastered space flight and had discovered the Citadel, they made contact with the Arkanes. Fortunately, due to both species being peace loving, a war did not break out between the two. Despite this though, the Arkanes preferred to isolate themselves from the others and took to remaining in their own star cluster, which they took to completely colonizing.

When the first contact war broke out between the Turians and the humans, for a time the Arkanes observed and studied. After some time though they decided to end the war themselves. They gathered up their Helldiver forces and set out to intercept both sides. However the Citadel council beat them to it and ended the war for them. Despite this however, the Arkanes had been incredibly impressed by the human's bravery, military strength and strategies. Their respect for humanity even increased when the Batarians started to enslave the them. The Arkanes where appalled by this since they despised slavery and felt that the Batarians had no right to enslave a race that was not their own. In light of this, they decided to evolve the Helldivers even further. They invited the humans to join their ranks and become Helldivers. It was on Mindoir that the Helldivers first revealed themselves to the entire galaxy by driving the Batarians off planet and freeing all the human slaves. It was even said that this was another reason why the Batarians closed their embassy on the Citadel and left Council space. After this, everything changed. The Citadel Council immediately took notice and began to push for an opportunity to join the Helldivers. Although the Arkanes where very mistrustful of the Council at first, after some time the Arkanes finally agreed and allowed the three council races to join the Helldivers. It was this move that made the Arkanes come to the decision that they need to train their soldiers to work with and understand one another regardless of their race or species.

As the Helldivers continued to grow in numbers and strength they eventually managed to become the largest multi species military force in the entire galaxy. With this development their territory increased too. This however drew worry from the Citadel Council since the Helldivers had managed to successfully operate in both Council Space and the Terminus systems for many years. The Council became even more concerned with the Helldivers when the Arkanes began accepting Krogan and Quarians into their ranks. To try and reaffirm these suspicions the Council offered the Arkanes a seat on the Council. This however did not turn out well when the Arkanes found out that they would have to give up their territory in the Terminus systems and the Attican Traverse if they joined. The Arkanes attempted to reason with the Council but they constantly refused due to fear that the Terminus systems would accuse the Council of making a push on their territory if they were allied with the Arkanes. After the Council refused multiple times to allow the Arkanes to keep their territory if they joined, the Arkanes declined the offer to join the Council. Eventually though the Council and the Arkanes reached a compromise and agreed to work with one another. After this the Arkanes dedicated their lives to protecting any worlds or colonies that the Council would refuse to protect. The Systems Alliance in particular where very supportive of Helldivers freeing human slaves and protecting their colonies. Despite the Council fearing that this activity may one day trigger war with the Terminus systems, the Arkanes and the Helldivers have since been looked up to as the largest and finest soldiers in the galaxy. Because of this the Batarians and the Terminus systems have been reluctant to attempt war with the Arkanes and the Helldivers since they fear they may lose due to the Helldivers numbers and technology. Plus they also fear that if they attack the Helldivers they risk a war with every species recruited into the Helldivers, in this case, almost eighty five percent of the entire galaxy.
However, despite their reputation, some see the Helldivers as being brutal against the Batarians. In particular a mission on Torfan enforce these rumours. On that mission the Helldivers and the Alliance had joined forces to rescue a group of human slaves and take back the human territory there. The mission however ended up being a Batarian massacre and all the hostages and slaves were killed.

Despite this though, the Helldivers are always held in high regard by humanity and the Alliance. Some of the other Alien races do also have respect for the Helldivers and the Arkanes.

Then came a topic that Liara was a little bit more familiar with. She'd only heard bits here and there, but she was aware of how much the galaxy talked about it... The Hellspawn Civil War.

The Hellspawn Civil War was the name given to a 5 year conflict between the Helldivers and a terrorist organization known as Hellspawn who sought the extermination of the Helldivers and all alien life, save humans. Hellspawn was founded by a terrorist known as the Commander, a fallen Helldiver who betrayed the Arkanes and reportedly hated all alien life. Hellspawn's ultimate goal was to make humanity the only sentient life in existence, thereby allowing only them to rule the entire galaxy.

The Commander however first wanted revenge on the Helldivers due to his betrayal causing him great injury, leaving him forever scarred and deformed. Add to the fact also that they represented the opposite of Hellspawn's goal, all races unified and mingling under one banner.

First beginning in 2176, the war lasted 5 long years, raging mostly throughout the terminus systems. Only in the final year of the war did it enter Alliance space when Hellspawn swept into Faranhell, a capital city in Alliance territory. Exterminating all the non humans, Hellspawn took the human population hostage, threatening to kill them if any dared to try and interfere. The Alliance sought the help of the Helldivers to stage a rescue and evacuation of the city. None other than Alpha Squad themselves were chosen to rescue the hostages. The operation proved successful and the populace was swiftly evacuated. With the risk of casualties now gone and the city clear, both the Helldivers and the Alliance banded together and retaliated. After a long battle, the city was retaken and Hellspawn driven from the planet.

The battle marked the end of the Hellspawn Civil War in 2181 with the death of the Commander and with him, the fall of his terrorist organization.

Liara sat back in her chair as she finished reading. Now all the stories she had heard about the Helldivers made perfect sense. Plus she knew more about the human she had clearly become very attracted to. She could now no longer deny that her interest in Shepard had now grown beyond just his visions of the Protheans. There was something compelling and very intriguing about him. He was handsome, smart, brave, caring, had a good sense of humour, had saved her life and fought a massive mutated Geth Prime hand to hand and had clearly done much for the Citadel Council to make him humanities first human Spectre. Add to that, his service record alone showed he was a decorated hero and war veteran.

She was however conflicted about her feelings for him. Did he have the same sort of mutual attraction her? Plus there was also the question of him and Ashley Williams. She was his own species and seemed more his type. Now she honestly didn't know whether it would be appropriate to
act on her feelings. She would just have to hope that the next time he came to speak with her, he would help clear a lot of things up for her and she also hoped she would not make a fool of herself doing it.

"And so that's how I got this one." Said Wrex as he indicated his largest scar. He and Austin where busy exchanging war stories with one another and telling each other the stories behind some of their war scars. Wrex couldn't deny he was beginning to form some respect for the human.

"Ouch. I've never known anyone to survive that." Said Austin.

"Probably because you haven't seen a Krogan take down one." Wrex replied. "That was probably one the finest moments of my entire life. Even before I became a mercenary. What about you, Shepard? Surely you must have some point in your life as Helldiver that you extremely proud of?"

"You bet I do." Said Austin enthusiastically. "Sure Elysium is said to be proudest career highlight, but my favourite would have to be when I took on an Arkane, a Batarian and another Helldiver single-handed. Interested?"

"Go ahead, I'm listening intently." Said Wrex as he folded his arms and leaned against the box he was stood in front of.

"Well this story reaches back around six or seven years ago. Back then I was still a Lieutenant in helldiver training. Recently all of the Helldivers where in a difficult time. The Batarians seemed to know our every move and we were taking heavy losses and losing precious territory. I eventually found a lead that suggested one of our people had betrayed us and that we had spy in our midst, I investigated further…”

FLASHBACK

Secret Meeting Place, Prometheus Station, Arkadia, December 1st, 2176

Austin held his breath as he waited. The Intel that Sparkle had given him showed that the meeting had been scheduled to be here. The info hadn't said who though. He'd been waiting for nearly an hour now, and still nothing. He was getting very worried. He had promised the Arkane Council that he was very close to tracking down the moles and spies in their ranks. Suddenly he heard footsteps. He instantly cloaked to avoid being spotted.

He could see two people approaching. He moved slightly to get a closer look. He was surprised by what he saw. A Batarian and an Arkane.

The Batarian was dressed in the armour that all Batarian slavers usually wore. The Arkane wasn't a Helldiver. In fact, he looked like one of the Arkane diplomats that had once served on the Citadel.

The two stopped and waited. Then Austin heard more footsteps. He looked in their direction, and his worst fears were realised. A Helldiver soldier came walking up to the Batarian and the Arkane. What made it even worse was that he knew this Helldiver. His name Jarric Barros, someone that Austin had fought alongside once. Austin decided to make his move. He didn't need to hear what they were saying, all he had needed was to find out who the moles where, after that the Arkane Council had said that they wanted him taken alive. They would handle making him talk. They had many different ways of interrogation.

"Consorting with a Batarian and getting an Arkane to betray us as well. I'm disappointed, Jarric." He said.
Immediately upon hearing his voice all three enemies pulled out their weapons. The Batarian pulled out two shotguns, he ponied one at Jarric and the other at Austin. The Arkane pulled out two pistols which he also pointed at both Austin and Jarric. Jarric pulled out an SMG and a shotgun, which he pointed at the Batarian and the Arkane. Austin pulled out his Assault rifle and his SMG which he also pointed at the Batarian and the Arkane.

"You! I knew we couldn't trust you, Jarric!" the Arkane shouted.

"I had nothing to do with this! You're the one that's in charge of covering our tracks!" Jarric shouted.

"I should've just killed you both when I had the chance." Said the Batarian.

All four opponents merely stood for a while, still locked in a four way Mexican standoff, all of them unwilling to make the first move.

"Right, a little Mexican standoff we got here." Said Austin.

"How about this? Everyone drop their weapons at the same time." Jarric suggested.

"And we'll let you escape with your dignity intact." Said Austin.

The Arkane and the Batarian both looked at each other and nodded.

"You heard, Shepard! Drop them!" Jarric ordered.

At the same time all four of them threw their weapons to the ground.

"That's good. Now…" Austin started. But he was interrupted as the Arkane activated his omni tool and a whip perturbed out of it. He swung it Austin but the Helldiver ducked, as did the Batarian.

"Jarric, watch out!" Austin yelled. But the whip slashed Jarric right across the chest, tearing a large of portion of his armour to pieces.

The Arkane then turned back to Austin and lashed again, but this time Austin was ready for it. He activated his omni blade and sliced the whip apart as it came for him.

"Shepard, catch!" Jarric shouted as he threw his shotgun to Austin. Austin caught it and aimed it at the Arkane. As the Arkane lunged for him he fired and the shotgun round hit the Arkane right in the face. He fell dead instantly.

"Behind you!" shouted Jarric as he attempted to keep the Batarian occupied. Austin immediately acted without hesitation. He stabbed the Batarian right in the back and lifted the alien right over his head and brought him onto the ground really hard. The Batarian's neck snapped as soon as it hit the ground. Austin took a moment to get his breath back and then he turned to Jarric.

"You're coming with me." He said as he picked up Jarric. "Don't even think of trying to escape!"

_END FLASHBACK_

"So what happened to the traitor?" asked Wrex.

"He was tried, court martialled and interrogated until the Arkanes squeezed every little bit of information out of him. After that, I don't know what happened." Austin replied.

"I had a feeling you would be." Said Austin "Even Kraan was impressed with that story when I told him."


"Yeah. You know him?" Austin asked.

"He and I knew each other when we first took our Rites of Passage. He ever tell you about those?" Wrex asked.

"You're pitted against many foes designed to test your skill and determine if you're worthy to join a clan. First Varren, then Klixens and then finally a Thresher Maw." Austin replied.

"You know, Shepard. I usually hold humans in very low regard. With you however, I make an acceptionation." Said Wrex.

"You're not going soft on me, are you Wrex?" Austin joked.

"Just because I might like you, doesn't mean I still wouldn't shoot you." Said Wrex, playing along with the joke.

"Talk to you later, Wrex." Said Austin as he walked off.

"Oh, hello Shepard." Said Tali, sounding slightly depressed.

"What's the matter? You alright?" asked Austin.

"I don't know. You're ship is definitely amazing and all and your crews been very good to me, especially Adams. But I just feel a bit, out of place. The Normandy runs so smooth that it feels like we're not even moving and the engines are so quiet. How do you sleep at night?" she asked.

“Oh, I see where this is going. You're not used to the quiet because of life on the Flotilla aren't you?" said Austin

"Yes, I… Can you read my mind or something, Shepard?" Tali asked, surprised.

"No. It's just that I had a Quarian back on my original Helldiver team, Leena Vas Penthra. She had the exact same sort of problems when she first joined the Helldivers."

"I heard about her. I had no idea that she'd joined the Helldivers though." Said Tali.

"She's one of the best engineers I've seen. Besides you obviously. Despite that though she too had some trouble adjusting to life outside of the Flotilla. Sometimes we don't appreciate what we have until it's gone." Said Austin.

"That's true. I'm starting to wonder if that's what the Pilgrimage is really about. It's given me a whole new perspective on my people and our culture." Said Tali.

"Maybe. Anyway, I'm sure you'll get used to the silence, everyone gets homesick sometimes. Even me." Said Austin reassuringly.

"I'm sure you're right. But thanks for your concern. It's nice to you care about me." Said Tali.

"As far as I'm concerned, everyone on this ship is an equal and they should be treated as such. You being a Quarian might matter to some, but it doesn't matter to me." Said Austin
"Thank you, Shepard. That means a lot." Said Tali warmly. "Anyway, I should get back to work, but thanks for checking one me."

Tali went back to her work and Austin left the Engine room. At first it looked as though Garrus wasn't at his usual post. But then Austin noticed a pair of Turian legs sticking out from underneath the Mako.

"Having fun, Garrus?" he asked.

There was a loud clang and Austin heard Garrus swear.

"Oh. Oops. Didn't mean to sneak up on you like that. Sorry." He apologised.

"It's no problem." Said Garrus as he rubbed his head. "What can I do for you?"

"Why did you want to be a C-sec officer in the first place?" Austin asked.

"You know, that's good question. There where several reasons I guess." Said Garrus.

"Such as?" Austin asked.

"I guess I was like the other C-sec agents. Wanted to fight injustice, help people. Plus I think my father had something to do with it as well. Looking back now I think it probably was him. He's a C-sec officer, one of the best. He's taking my resignation pretty hard." Garrus replied.

"Must hurt. But surely he'd be impressed with you going after Saren?" Austin asked.

"He doesn't quite see it that way. He says either do things right or don't do them at all. He thinks I'm being a bit too rash with my decision. He even taught how to becoming a Spectre when I was younger for the same reasons." Said Garrus.

"You, where asked to be a Spectre?" Austin asked.

"Not exactly. I was targeted as a possible Spectre candidate along with a thousand other Turian recruits. I could've received special training, but my father didn't like it. He despises the Spectres. He thinks the Council she be a bit stricter with them. Thinks that giving unlimited power with no accountability corrupts them just like Saren." Said Garrus.

"He's right though. I agree with him on that. Saren's just a perfect example of how all that power can make Spectres fall to their pride and greed." Said Austin.

"But still. Saren's not going to play by any rules. If you want to nail him you should send someone who won't be held back by politics or restrictions." Said Garrus.

"No. You don't have to. Besides, just because laws can be broken, it doesn't mean they should. I don't need to stoop to Saren's level to stop him." Said Austin.

"That is a very good point, Shepard." Said Garrus. "That gives me something to think about. Now, if you'll excuse me I need to finish these calibrations before our next mission."

And with that, Garrus went back to working on the Mako.

Right. I plan to do one or two side missions, one involving Wrex's family armour and the other involving Nassana Dantius in the next chapter. Also we'll meet Shepard's Mother and sister in
Chapter 9 I think. After that, off to Feros.

Stay tuned and keep reviewing, you know how much I love them.
Chapter 9, Missions for Others

Right, sorry that this one's a bit short, but with side missions they usually are. But at least with the beginning we get to meet Shepard's mother and sister. His father will appear later in the story.

Anyway, next chapter will be Feros and i hope your looking forward to that one. The changes i plan to make will hopefully make it interesting, you can also expect the Terror Geth to show up again.

Anyway, enjoy the chapter.

Chapter 9

Missions for Others

"Commander. You're gonna want to see this. I've got an important message from an Alliance Captain. She says she's your mother." Said Joker through the radio.

Austin's face lit up in surprise.

"Patch her in through in the comm room." Austin ordered.


Austin walked into the comm room.

"Setting link up now." Said Joker.

An orange hologram of a female Alliance Captain appeared in front of Austin.

"Austin. Good to finally see you again. You look good." She said.

"Hi mum. So do you." Austin replied happily.

In front of Austin, was his own mother, Captain Hannah Shepard. Like her son, Hannah had short brown hair and had one or two facial resemblances to him. She too had a British accent. Unlike Austin however, her eyes where green, with the hologram however it was hard to tell.

"So, the first human Spectre. Must be quite an honor. You're father and I are so proud." She said.

"Actually, how is dad? I haven't heard from him for a while." Austin asked.

"You father's still out in the Terminus systems. Their trying to hold back an army of Batarian salvers and Pirates. All he said was, it's nothing to worry about. He did however tell me to send his regards to you and that he really regrets being unable to see you." Hannah replied.

"I understand." Austin replied. "How's Sarah? I hear she recently graduated into the N7 program."

"Actually, she said she'd be here with us. So give it a minute and she might…” Hannah though was interrupted when another hologram appeared next to her. The hologram was that of a young woman dressed in N7 armour. This was Sarah, Jane Shepard. Hannah’s daughter and Austin's younger sister.
She looked very much like her mother, only younger. A major difference though was that she had red hair rather than brown. In truth though, this was because she had dyed it red and she also had it grown longer than her mother's. Like the rest of her family she too had a British accent.

"Sorry I'm a bit late, mum. Had a few connectivity issues." She said. She then turned to her brother. "Hi bro. It's been too long."

"Good to see you too, sis. And congratulations on the N7 graduation. That armour looks good on you." Said Austin.

Sarah merely chuckled and looked at the armour he had referred to.

"Yeah, I admit it's a nice change from the traditional armour that normal Alliance marines get. Seems as though you're always getting the promotions before me however. You get the N7 first and now you're a Spectre." She said.

"Just doing what I can." Said Austin.

The two siblings smiled to one another.

"I will have to be going soon, Austin. You know, duty calls. Admiral Hackett though asked me to inform you of a little situation on he'd like you to look into." Said Hannah.

"Alright, go ahead." Said Austin.

"Apparently the Alliance has found some intel about some slavers and pirates on the planet Tuntau in the Phoenix system in the Argos Rho cluster." Said Hannah. "I have to go. But take care of yourself, Austin. You're making us all proud and I'm sure your father would say the same. Captain Hannah out."

Hannah's hologram disappeared, leaving Austin with his sister.

"So, managed to get a girl yet, bro?" she asked.

Austin merely chuckled and sighed.

"Sarah, I really do wonder how many times you're going to keep asking me that. Do you keep asking me because you hope you'll get a boyfriend before I get a girlfriend?" He asked.

"You could say that." Sarah chuckled. "Take care of yourself out there, Austin. As you Helldivers say, give them hell."

Sarah's hologram vanished and Austin headed back to the CIC. He plotted the coordinates into the galaxy map and then started to debate who to take with him on the mission. If Austin had to be honest with himself though he was being illogical he kept running through different people but each combination included the Azure beauty Liara. He couldn't help himself, he wanted to get closer to her and she fascinated him. Plus, after seeing how strong her biotics where on Therum he was keen to see how well she performed in a fight and how powerful her biotics really where. Eventually he decided on taking both Liara and Wrex. He almost regretted bringing Liara when he saw her walk into the cargo bay with tight form fitting light armour. She had the body that any model would kill for: Well-toned legs, nice rounded hips, a perfect round butt, a killer waistline, and large completely perfect breasts. He was thankful he was wearing his helmet, he knew that neither Wrex nor Liara would have missed him ogling her. Since they didn't know for certain where the salver and pirate facility was they would have to take the Mako for this mission. After a short but rather bumpy drive they found the facility they had been looking for.
"Okay, let's get in there." Said Austin.

The first room appeared to be deserted, but Austin's suit could detect that all the slavers and pirates where in the next room.

"I know who runs this place." Said Wrex.

"You do? How do you know that? Have you been here before or something?" Austin asked.

"No, but I was planning on coming here before we met each other. This place belongs to a Turian named Tonn Actus. Long story short he's got something that's rightfully mine." Wrex replied.

"Like what?" asked Austin.

"Ancestral family armour. It's been with my ancestors for over five generations. The Turians took it from my father's father after the war ended. Somehow this ass wound up with it, I want it back." Said Wrex.

"I don't see why not. There's all kinds of useful stuff in here." Said Austin.

All the enemies where right behind the door. Austin decided to execute another door breach maneuverer similar to the one he had done back at Chora's Den. After he had filed Liara in on how it would be done the two took cover. Wrex couldn't charge in this time though since there were too many boxes in the environments so Austin decided to opt for a more Stealth like breach rather than charge in gun blazing.

"Here's the plan. Once the door blows, we throw a flash bang grenade in. With the enemy disoriented we move in and take up a defensible position. From there, Liara will lay down a singularity." Said Austin.

Liara and Wrex nodded and both went into cover. Austin placed a detonator on the door and armed it. The whole door exploded. As it did, Austin threw a flash bang through the doorway. Everyone averted their gaze so that they wouldn't be blinded. There was a brief flash and then they proceeded in. Liara immediately activated a singularity with her biotics. Several of the pirates where caught in the singularities gravity pull. Wrex and Austin meanwhile laid down suppressing fire with their rifles.

After dealing with the rest of the pirates and Tonn Actus himself, Austin ordered the others to search the boxes for anything useful. Wrex was looking for his armour while Austin and Liara where trying to open a locked crate that was extremely stiff. Austin couldn't help but stare at Liara. Since she was trying her hardest to force the lid of it was showing some of the muscles she had. Eventually the lid did open, but it opened with such force that it sent both of them flying. Austin landed on his back and Liara landed on top of him. Since Austin had removed his helmet earlier they both stared into each other's eyes.

"I'm sorry, Austin. I didn't mean to…" Liara attempted to say. She was interrupted however as her feelings got the better of her and she kissed him. When the two finally did separate they were both shocked by what had just happened.

"I... Er... I..." Liara stuttered.

"We should... probably get up, Liara." Austin also struggled to say.

"Hey, Shepard! I think I found it, but it's in a locked safe. I need some help opening it!" came Wrex's voice from the upper level.
Liara got off of Austin and helped him up. While Austin went to deal with Wrex Liara went to see what was in the crate. To her surprise there was a white and pink set of Janissary armour. It was also female designed. This gave Liara an idea.

Austin made his way over to the safe that Wrex had indicated to. He activated his omni tool and did a quick scan, and the safe opened. Inside, was a very old and very battered Krogan armour. Austin took it out and gave it to Wrex.

"This is it. I can't believe that my ancestors ever wore this piece of crap. But at least it's back where it belongs. Thanks. I owe you." Said Wrex.

"Any time, Wrex." Said Austin. "Come on. Let's finish up here and get out of here."

Back on board the Normandy Austin was conflicted. He couldn't stop thinking about what had happened between Liara and him. It hadn't been the first he'd kissed someone, hell, he'd had sex with the Asari Consort a few days back. With Liara however, this kiss had been different, it had had more passion in it, and it almost seemed as though they...

Then something hit him. He remembered what Sha'ira had said to him about, the one who would give him peace and purpose again. What if Liara was that person? It wasn't like he hated her. Hell, he'd flirted with her and kissed her. He ultimately decided to go and talk with her.

"Austin, I... I didn't expect you." Said Liara as Austin walked into her quarters.

"Liara. I think we need to talk about what happened earlier today." Said Austin.

"Yes. I wanted to apologise for that. I don't know what came over me." Said Liara.

"Liara, you and I both know there's more to it than that. I've seen the way you look at me sometimes." Said Austin.

"I did not realize I was being that obvious." Said Liara. "But I can no longer deny that there is something really compelling about you. At first, I thought it was just your connection to the Protheans but somehow I find myself thinking about all the time. I even wanted to know everything there is to know. So much so that I looked into your history. I know what you did during the Blitz. What you did there was remarkable. I also saw all the other accomplishments you have made as Helldiver, especially the Hellspawn Civil War. It's no wonder the Council chose you as a Spectre."

"Wait. You looked into my history? How?." Austin asked.

"I looked you up on the extranet. I found several news articles with you name on them. I apologise if that invades your privacy, but I couldn't help myself." Liara apologised.

"No, it's okay. Liara. I'm not cross with you. I can understand why you'd want to find out more about me. But you didn't need to go behind my back. I would've gladly told you anything you wanted to know." Said Austin comfortingy.

"I apologise, Austin. But I was just so nervous. I may be used to flirting and teasing, but I've never actually returned feelings like these. I wanted to know what made you the man you are today." Said Liara.

"Are you sure though, Liara? Are you sure you are actually interested in me personally? Or is it just my vast connection to the Protheans? Because I want to believe that this interest is more than just that." Said Austin.
"I won't lie to you, Austin. Your connection to the Protheans did have something to do with my initial interest in you. But after I found out more about you, saw some of the things you had endured during your life and still prevailed, it grew beyond that. I find it growing to the point that I'm always happy to be around you. Something about you makes me feel more… alive." Said Liara.

"I see. But why do you make it sound as if it's wrong?" Austin asked.

"I don't know if it's appropriate for me to feel this way about you. I don't know if I should act on these feelings. I thought there might already be a relationship between you and Chief Williams." Said Liara.


"My mistake then. I guess I still have a lot learn about human relationships." Said Liara.

Somehow the two of them seemed to be edging closer to one another but they didn't notice it.

"Don't worry, Liara. Even humans themselves make the same mistakes like that. It's nothing to be embarrassed about." Said Austin as he put his hand reassuringly on her arm. For a moment, Liara was speechless. Having him touch her was… intoxicating.

"But what about us, Austin? I feel as though we share some mutual attraction. Do you feel the same way? Or am I wrong about that too?" Liara asked. Both t their faces where very close now.

"I… Well…" Austin stuttered. Then he suddenly felt very brave and decided to take a very long shot.

"I'll give you a big hint." He said confidently. Instantly, he grabbed Liara and pulled her into a long and very passionate kiss. At first, Liara was completely unprepared, but after just a few seconds she quickly eased into Austin and kissed him back. Time seemed to stand still for Liara. Her soft supple lips seemed to fit almost perfectly like a puzzle against his strong firm lips. She felt her self-control slipping as she wrapped her arms around him and deepened this kiss as he tightened his grasp and rested his hand on the back of her crest. When they finally separated for air Austin held her close and refused to let go.

"Does that answer your question?" he asked hopefully.

"Yes. Yes it definitely does." Liara said, out of breath and very surprised by Austin's sudden advancement but very happy. "I knew there was some sort mutual attraction between us, and I knew you felt it too."

"It feels so sudden. But I can no longer deny how I feel about you, Liara. I… I love you." Said Austin. He couldn't believe he'd managed to summon up the courage to say that. He had actually said "I love you."

"I feel the same, Austin. And I love you too. Goddess, I love you so much as well!" said Liara. They both smiled to one another and once again pulled each other into along passionate kiss. Austin could feel a tear streaking down Liara's cheek. But it wasn't a tear of sorrow, but of happiness.

"I should let you know, Liara. I've had many sexual partners. But I've never felt this way about anyone before. You're the first person I've ever loved before." Said Austin

"I'm sort of the same. But I have never even… been with someone before." Said Liara. "It does scare me though. I care for you so much that I cannot bear the thought of losing you."
"Well then I'll make you a promise then that I'll never leave you" said Austin. He felt himself on the brink of tears. Who knew that the brave, suave, fearless commander could even shed a tear. Austin sat down in a chair and just held her close. It wasn't very long before Austin looked down and saw Liara with a peaceful smile on her face in a deep sleep, he closed his own eyes thinking he would do whatever it takes to always make her smile.

"With all due respect, sir. This is one of the most advanced ships in the Alliance. I don't think that they should be allowed to poke at the vital systems." Said Ashley.

Austin was now currently in the cargo bay. After a long and very peaceful nap with Liara he had decided to head back down and have a chat with Williams. However Ashley seemed to have doubts about the alien crew members. He was beginning to think this wasn't such a good idea.

"You don't trust allies of the Alliance?" Austin asked. He was doing his best not to just order her to fall in line. She was his friend, he should at least listen.

"Humanity has to learn to rely on itself, not on others." Said Ashley.

"Standing up for ourselves doesn't mean we have to stand alone." Said Austin. "What made you think this way?"

"My whole family defended the Alliance since it was first founded. Right down to my great grandmother, they all picked up a rifle and swore the oath of service. I guess we just tend to think of Earth interests as our own."

"Alright. Look, I can see where your concerns are coming from, Ash. But this is a multilateral and a Helldiver mission, and Helldivers work and fight alongside other species. You're going to have to work with aliens whether you like it or not. Sorry if that's not what you wanted to hear, but although I am a Spectre, I'm still a Helldiver first and foremost, and I'm not about to change that now." Said Austin.

"I understand, sir. Don't worry. It won't be a problem. You say jump, I say how high. You tell me to kiss a Turian, I'll ask which cheek." Said Ashley.

"Alright, alright. No need to go that far." said Austin sternly. "We'll talk later."

"Sir."

Austin was now in the CIC again. He planned to check out the colony Feros next, but he felt it best to get one or two resupplies before heading out. So he had ordered Joker to head back to the Citadel.

"Commander, we've got a message coming in from the Citadel. Patching it through." Came Joker's voice.

"Commander, Shepard. My name is Nassana Dantius. I have a proposition for you if you're interested. Meet me on the Citadel in the Embassy lounge." Said the message.

Austin was once again back on the Presidium. This time though, he wasn't alone. Liara was right beside him. Since they were resupplying, Austin had decided to spend some quality time with Liara, seeing as the two had just confessed their love for one another. Currently, they were stood in front of the monument of a Mass Relay. Both their hand where intertwined with one another and they were talking about both their pasts.
"So apart from your mother and you not knowing your father, do you have any other family?" asked Austin.

"I am afraid not. It could be that I may have half-sisters though. Benezia was around 800 when I was born, so it's possible she could have had more children before me. But if she did, she never told me." Said Liara.

"I'm sorry to hear that." Said Austin.

"It's not a problem, Austin." Said Liara. "Besides, I've got you. What more could I want?" she asked happily.

Austin smiled at her and brought her into another kiss.

"Best thing that's ever happened to me." Said Austin.

"I'll tell you something I'd love for us to do if we were allowed to." Said Liara.

"What's that?" Austin asked.

"I'd love for us to go swimming in that lake. Just too bad we're not allowed too." Said Liara.

"Wow! Where did that come from?" Austin asked.

"Sometimes, swimming with partners is common in Asari relationships." Liara responded. "Although if we were to do that I would need to do some shopping first."

"Why's that?" Austin asked.

"Well I have no swim attire. Since I was mostly by myself before this there was never any reason to cover myself." Liara explained.

"Wait… You're telling me that for the past years you've swam naked?" Austin asked.

"I had a feeling that would get you attention." Said Liara.

"Now that's hot. And you're right, it is a shame we can't swim in that lake and also a shame that that they have some rules about modesty. I'm starting to wish I'd met you sooner." Said Austin slyly.

"Me too. I love you, Austin." Said Liara.

"I love you too, Liara." Said Austin.

The two once again drew each other into a long, passionate kiss.

"Commander, Shepard. I am Nassana Dantius. I see you got my message."

Austin and Liara where now in the embassy lounge talking with the Asari diplomat, Nassana Dantius whom Austin had received the message from earlier.

"Sounded like you needed some help." Said Austin.

"I do. My sister, Dahlia is a crewman on a cargo vessel operating out in the Traverse. Her ship was attacked by privateers. No survivors." Said Nassana.

"I'm very sorry to hear that." Said Austin.
"Unfortunately this is where it gets complicated. I recently received a message with her voice on it. Dahlia is alive but the rest of the crew was killed. She was taken prisoner. They demanded a huge ransom for her release."

"Well then it seems like the best option is to just pay the ransom." Said Austin.

"I did. But they never released her and I've heard nothing from them since."

"Let me guess then. You want me to find her and bring her back?" Austin asked.

"Just bring her back. You don't need to worry about finding her. They're operating somewhere in the Artemis Tau cluster." Said Nassana.

"Don't worry. One way or another I'll get her back alive." Said Austin.

"Thank you, Shepard. I knew you were the right man for the job." Said Nassana.

For getting Dahlia back, Austin had decided to take Ashley and Tali for this trip. Once the drop ship had touched down they disembarked.

"Okay, ladies. Let's rescue ourselves an Asari." He said.

Once inside the base they were instantly met with several hostile Asari slavers and pirates. Tali however was quick to react to the situation and she quickly had their enemy's shields down, allowing the two marines to finish them off. Austin was now very thankful that he'd brought her along, it made the job a lot easier. Once they had finished them off they searched the area. There was no sign of an Asari prisoner though. The Tali suddenly shouted from upstairs.

"Shepard! You'd better take a look at this!" she shouted.

Austin and Ashley hurried upstairs. Austin examined the terminal that Tali was indicating to. The info appeared to say that the Asari that had been leading the slavers they had just killed was in fact Dahlia.

"The Asari leading the salvers. She was, Dahlia. And she was blackmailing Nassana." Said Austin.

"There was no way that Nassana didn't know about this." Said Ashley.

"Exactly. Nassana lied to us! Come on, let's go. We're done here." said Austin crossly.

"Shepard. Did you find her?" asked Nassana.

"I did. She's dead. You lied to me, didn't you?! I found out that she was blackmailing you." Said Austin, expecting an explanation.

"So the truth comes out. I can see you're angry. Surely you can understand why I lied to you?" Nassana asked.

"Do enlighten me, please." Said Austin as he folded his arms.

"If people found out that my sister was a slaver I'd be considered a security risk. That is why I mislead you. I couldn't take the risk of you exposing me. But now that you've dealt with her, it's no problem." Nassana explained coldly.
"You didn't need to lie to me, Nassana. I still would've helped you. Even if what you made me do was a little cold." Said Austin.

"Then I do apologise, Shepard. We have had trust issues that run in my family. Still, you did help me, I will transfer a little something into your account as a token of my appreciation. Plus as a way of apologising for lying to you I will have your name added to our manufactures list. I think you will benefit well from what we have available." Said Nassana.

"Pleasure doing business with you, Nassana." Austin said coldly.

"Likewise, Shepard." Nassana replied.

The we are. I apologise if this one was a bit boring, but at least it's out of way now. I've only done the Nassana mission because that features in ME2 during Thane's recruitment. Also the family armour will have in impact on Virmire.

Also i will say the swimming thing will actually happen between Liara and Shepard, it'll be their first... Really intimate moment. But not until after Feros. So be patient with me.

Anyway, Feros is next so i'll make sure to put a bit more effort into that one.

Until next time.
Chapter 10, The Colony of Feros

Finally, I've finished chapter 10. So far this one is the longest out of all of the chapters.

Hope you enjoy it.

Chapter 10

The Colony of Feros

En route to the colony of Feros Austin was currently making one or two modifications to his armour.

Another beauty about the suit remover machines was that they could reassemble armour as well and even reassemble it without the user having to be inside. This came in handy for display purposes or if the user wanted to make repairs or modifications as Austin was doing. He always enjoyed occasionally fiddling with his armour. Ever since he was a young boy he'd always like occasionally building things. There'd even been some cases where he'd build something and then take it apart again and then rebuild it purely for the fun of it. In this case he often liked to just occasionally play around with his armour. It took his mind off things and it was a good way for him to relax if he was stressed since he needed to be in control and calm when handling some of the components of his armour.

At that moment the door to his Quarters opened and Liara stood in the doorway.

"Austin, may I come in?" she asked.

"By all means, Liara." Said Austin happily. He was always happy to see her.

Liara walked in and took a moment to admire the Quarters that had once belonged to Captain Anderson, but now belonged to Austin.

"Since it will be some hours before we reach Feros, I was getting bored with the wait. Thought I'd try and kill some time with you. What are you doing?" she asked.

"Just passing the time." Austin replied as he continued working on his armour. He still turned his head to talk to Liara though so that he did not appear rude. Fortunately Liara walked up to him and knelt down next to him to save him the trouble. "I'm applying some new upgrades to my armour. Since we're dealing with Geth, the Arkanes ordered our best engineers to build a new shield generator and booster that would allow my shields to be much stronger and able to better withstand Geth laser fire." He explained.

"Isn't this the sort of job suited for a tech expert?" Liara asked, slightly confused.

"Actually Helldivers are taught how to modify and fix their suits. Engineers are more taught how to fix our ships or ground transports." Austin replied.

"Do you… want some help at all" Liara asked.

"Sure. Why not?" said Austin.

For next few hours or so Austin spent the time showing Liara what various pieces of his suit did, how they worked, how to fix them and also how to replace them safely. Liara had to admit that she
was finding this very interesting, and Austin explained it in such detail that he made the suit sound almost like more than just a simple suit of armour.

"I've been thinking, Liara. You know what you said back on the Citadel? About us going swimming?" Austin asked.

"Yes?" Liara answered suspiciously.

"Well, I was thinking. I found out about a private swimming pool located on the Citadel and Spectre status gives me access to it. I wondered if you might be interested. It's also just us, so swimming attire isn't necessary." Austin said suggestively.

Liara laughed. "You're joking. Please tell me you're joking." Liara chuckled.

"No, I'm not. I'm serious." Said Austin.

Liara was quite surprised. When she had mentioned swimming she had really just meant it as a romantic joke. But now that he was willing to make that a reality.

"Wow. Er…" she stuttered. Then she decided to brave. "Alright, Austin. But I still have no swimming attire. Should I buy some?"

"That's entirely up to you, Liara. What matters is that we both enjoy it together." Said Austin as he smiled at Liara.

"Be honest though, Austin. Are you just doing this as an excuse to see me naked? Because if it is, you don't need to arrange a private swim just for that." Liara teased.

"Okay, I admit it was partly that. But I would actually love for us to spend some more… Romantic time with each other. Although, being able to see you swim naked is something a lot of young males would kill for. Plus I go by an old saying. Never waste a good opportunity." Said Austin.

"You're so sweet and charming. And that's why I love you." Said Liara as she drew Austin into a kiss.

"Very well then. After Feros we'll head back to the Citadel. I'll give everyone some shore leave so that they don't get suspicious about me disappearing off the ship with you." Said Austin.

"I look forward to it." Said Liara slyly. "Oh and Austin… I want you to swim naked with me."

Feros was a very new planet for Austin. He had never been here before so it was a whole new experience. According to what he had read, the colony they were investigating was called Zhu's Hope. The colony was situated in one of the massive Prothean skyscraper ruins that blanketed two-thirds of the planet's land mass. The atmosphere was fouled with dust and terrestrial travel was hampered was hampered by crumbled debris that was dozens of metres deep. Feros was considered a poor prospect for colonization, as little open ground remained for agriculture. The only sizeable fresh water sources where poles, which where tapped by the decaying Prothean aqueduct system. The dead cities, while in good condition considering their antiquity, where of certain stability. Ground level was congested by a dozen meters of fallen debris, and the air was fouled by dust. In 2178, the human ExoGeni Corporation announced its intention to place a permanent colony on Feros, to thoroughly explore the ruins. The pioneer settlement was placed on the upper levels of the several intact skyscrapers, using the surviving Prothean aqueducts and rooftop hydroponics gardens to support the population.
Since Austin didn't know for certain if Geth had invaded he decided to take Liara and Tali for this mission. That way they would be prepared for any situation since Liara had full Biotic skills, Tali had full Tech skills and he had the soldier skills.

Unlike previous missions they didn't need to drop off in the Mako or use the drop ship. They just docked and used the airlock. When Austin stepped into the airlock though he was quite surprised. Instead of her usual tight fitting light armour Liara now had a white and pink Janissary armour set, complete with a helmet.

"Liara? I'm not complaining, but, where'd you get that from?" he asked.

"You remember that crate we struggled to open?" Liara responded.

"Oh, so that's what was in there. So you thought you'd use that instead?" Austin asked.

"Yeah. You like it?" Liara asked.

Austin looked at the armour up and down. True it wasn't as sexy looking as the tight fitting armour she had originally worn. But with this one she looked more like she was ready for a battle.

"Like it? I love it!" he said. "You sure it will help in combat though?"

"It's designed for biotic use. So, yes." Liara replied.

"Right then. Let's see if these colonists need our help." Said Austin as he unholstered his Assault rifle.

There was the sound of locking as the Normandy docked. There was a brief pause and then the doors opened. Upon exiting the Normandy they were greeted by a man.

"We saw you're ship. Fai Dan wants to speak with you immediately." He said.

"Who's Fai Dan?" Austin asked.

"He's our leader. He needs your help. The Geth are preparing to make another push. Please, up the stairs past the freighter." Said the man.

Suddenly a large rocket fired at them. All three of them were able to dodge it and move to cover, but the man wasn't so lucky. Immediately a huge gunfight broke out between both sides. Austin was now very thankful he'd brought a tech and biotic expert. If things where this bad, he'd need them. Liara was quickly able to dispatch most of the Geth with her biotics but they then brought out rocket troopers.

"Rockets! Keep your head down!" Austin yelled.

His two comrades instantly obeyed and went into cover. Liara was at least able to pull one the Rocket Troopers over the edge with her biotics before doing so. Austin holstered his assault rifle and took out his sniper.

"Just need to time this right." He thought to himself. He briefly popped out of cover, lined his target up with a rocket trooper and fired. The Geth went down instantly.

Tali was then quickly able to paralyse some of the Geth using an energy overload, giving Liara the opening she needed. The new armour she wore had better shields and helped her biotics cool down quicker. Before the Geth had time to recover she deployed a singularity. The biotic black hole
consumed the Geth in seconds. The path was clear.

"Nice work, everyone." Said Austin as he, took his assault rifle back out. "We were unprepared for that one. Be on your guard."

They proceeded further into the colony. Although it was clear, Austin couldn't help but get the feeling they were being watched. Eventually they reached the top of the stairs and found themselves at the entrance to the colony. At first the guards were ready to fire but after seeing that they weren't Geth they stood down. After a quick stroll through the colony they found who they were looking for, Fai Dan.

"Oh, Commander Shepard. I'm glad they finally sent someone to help us." He greeted.

Next to Fai Dan was a woman. She didn't look as happy to see them as he was.

"A bit late, aren't you?" she asked crossly.

"Arcelia!" Fai Dan interjected. "I'm sorry, Commander. Everyone's been on edge since-" but he was interrupted by the sound of Geth gunfire.

"Watch out! We've got Geth in the tower!" Arcelia shouted.

"Protect the heart of the colony!" Fai Dan ordered.

"Everyone, hold this line!" Austin ordered to his team.

Everyone immediately took up defensive positions at the entrance. Geth after Geth attempted to get through but the combined force of the colonists and Austin and his team kept them from getting close. Just when they seemed to be beating them back however, the Geth's leader joined the fray.

"How many times do I have to kill that Terror Geth!?" Austin thought angrily.

Once again the Terror Geth had repaired itself from Austin's omni blade. As soon as it saw him, it growled upon seeing its old nemesis.

"Kill the Helldiver!" it yelled to its soldiers.

The Terror Geth fired several shots from its plasma blaster, which it had also repaired from last time. All the shots missed Austin and his team but they still managed to kill several of the colonists or cause explosions that killed them.

"Fire in the hole!" Austin shouted as he threw a Grenade at the last few Geth. They were obliterated in seconds. The Terror Geth however retreated.

"Stay here! We'll drive them away!" Austin ordered to the colonists as he motioned for Liara and Tali to follow him.

As they proceed up the stairs they ran into more Geth. Fortunately Liara took care of them with a massive biotic push which sent the Geth flying into the wall and crushing them. Before they could proceed however another Geth turned up. But this one was different. It seemed to leap all over the place from wall to wall, and then it lunged at Liara. The force of the impact knocked her to the ground as the Geth tried to claw at her.

"Gagh! Get it off me!" she screamed.

Austin immediately reacted. Using all of his strength, he grabbed the Geth hopper and threw it to the
ground. He then pinned it there using his foot and unloaded his rifle into the Geth's head. It exploded completely, spraying some of Austin's armour with oil and other liquids that the Geth used.

"Liara, are you alright?" Austin asked as he helped his girlfriend up.

"Yes, I'm fine. Thank you, Austin." She said.

The three continued to drive the Geth back until they came to a large open chamber. There was a hole in the roof, and hovering above that hole was what looked like a Geth drop ship. Among the remaining Geth, was the Terror Geth. Once again it fired and ordered the other Geth to do so. This time though Austin activated his mini wrist nuke launcher and fired it at the Geth who were attempting to retreat into the drop ship. The nuke vaporized most of them but the rest still managed to escape onto drop ship, the Terror Geth among them. Without any more troops, the drop ship lifted off and flew away.

"Get back here, you cowardly machine!" Austin yelled.

"They're gone at least. We should let Fai Dan know that the tower is clear." Said Tali.

They headed back down to the colony. The injured were being treated by medics. Although Austin knew it wasn't his fault, he still felt as though there was something he could've done.

"The tower's secure. Thanks to you, Commander." Said Fai Dan.

"I'm just glad the colony's safe." Said Austin.

"I appreciate your concern… and your efforts against the Geth." Said Fai Dan. "If you don't mind me asking though, Commander. What are you, exactly?"

"What's the matter? You've never seen a Helldiver before?" Austin asked.

"A Helldiver? Here? I thought the Alliance was in charge of this colony?" said Arcelia.

"They are. But I'm still technically in the Alliance. They asked me to investigate when the colony went silent." Austin replied.

"Then I am grateful to you for your assistance, Commander." Said Fai Dan.

"What are the Geth after? Do you know why they're here?" Austin asked.

"We don't know. They came, they attacked us. That's all we know. We do know however that their main base is at the ExoGeni headquarters. If you want answers, that's the best place for you to look." Fai Dan replied.

With the ExoGeni headquarters as their destination they began to leave the colony. "Shepard, Liara. Didn't those people seem a bit strange to you?" asked Tali

"Well I'm still getting use to understanding humans more but they did seem a bit tense." responded Liara

"Hmm what gets me is how every single colonist almost like programming referred us to Fai Dan , almost like they… had no independent thoughts of their own" stated Austin. "But I have a feeling that before we're done here we'll have an answer".

They made their way to the upper levels. After dispatching more Geth the found the Mako, ready for them to use on the skyways. As they climbed into the Mako Austin couldn't help but feel slightly
nervous. There was no telling how many Geth they'd find. He would just have to hope they weren't spotted.

The skyway was a blaze. There was laser fire all over the place. Austin could even see what looked like a Geth drop ship latched onto one of the buildings. Suddenly the radio seemed to crack into life.

"The last batch went south. What are they looking for?" it said.

"We are receiving a weak comm signal. I cannot pinpoint its location through the Geth interference." Said Liara.

"Keep that channel open at least. It sounds like more survivors." Said Austin.

After fighting their way through more Geth on the Skyway they finally reached the other side. As they entered the skyscraper the radio cracked into life again.

"We've got movement. Some kind of vehicle, not one of the Geth." It said.

"They've got us on visual. We must be close." Said Liara.

"Okay. We'll stop here and investigate on foot." Said Austin as they exited the Mako.

They didn't need to worry about tracking the signal. Austin's suit had detected nearby life forms. They appeared to be held up in some kind of bunker. The guards stood down upon seeing them.

"That's close enough!" said one of the colonists. He even pointed his gun at Austin.

"Relax, Jeong. They're obviously not Geth." Said a woman next to him.

"Oh, yeah? What about that one?!" said Jeong as he indicated to Austin.

"Jeong! He's a Helldiver!" the woman yelled.

Jeong slowly lowered his weapon. But he still seemed suspicious of the group.

"Stay back, Juliana." He said to the woman. "Who are you? What do you want?!" he demanded.

"Commander Austin Shepard of the Helldivers. We're here to remove you Geth problem." Austin replied.

"You see? You worry too much." Said Juliana.

"And you trust too easily, Juliana." Said Jeong.

"I'm just glad to see a friendly face. I thought we were the only humans left." Said Juliana.

"Not quite. Fai Dan and the rest of Zhu's Hope have banded together. They're managing to keep the Geth at bay." Said Austin.

"You said they were all dead!" Juliana said angrily to Jeong.

"I didn't know for certain." Jeong said defensively.

"We can help keep the Geth at bay. But we need information. Do you have any idea why they're here?" Austin asked.
"All we know is that they've set up base in the ExoGeni headquarters." Juliana replied.

"Those headquarters are private property, soldier. Remove the Geth and nothing else" Jeong ordered.

For Austin, that was the last straw.

"I don't know if you've noticed. But I don't take orders from you. So shut the hell up!" Austin replied angrily. Fortunately, that did the job and Jeong, shut up.

As Austin turned to leave though, Juliana stopped him.

"Commander, before you go… My daughter, Lizbeth. She's missing…” she said.

"We can do a proper count of the dead after…”

"I said shut up!" Austin yelled. "Sorry, Juliana. You were saying."

"She was working in the ExoGeni building when the Geth attacked us. Please, find her. She's my daughter. I can't bear to lose her." Juliana replied.

Austin walked up to her and put his hand reassuringly on her arm.

"You have my word, Juliana. I will find her. If she's still in the ExoGeni building, I'll get her out. Whatever it takes. I promise you that." He said.

"Thank you, Commander. Thank you." Said Juliana.

"You should stay her and remain bunkered down until I get back. And Juliana, even if the worse comes to pass, I'll still bring your daughter back. Hopefully though that won't happen." Said Austin as he headed back to the Mako, Liara and Tali quickly followed.

Once again, the skyway was filled with Geth. Fortunately Austin managed to discover an interesting way of running the Geth over. However they did also discover that Austin was not the best driver. Fortunately their journey came to an end before anyone threw up in their helmet. They quickly exited the Mako and made their way further into the ExoGeni headquarters. After dealing with the rest of the Geth they left in a rather dead end. The only doorway they could see appeared to be blocked by some kind of biotic field.

"Our weapons can't touch a field like this. We'll need another way in." said Liara.

Sure enough, after a short look they did find another way, however it lead down a small tunnel.

"A one way trip down, Austin." Said Liara.

"Well there's no other way, Liara. Let's go." Said Austin as they jumped down.

After the small drop they found something odd, dead Varren corpses. Suddenly a shot rang out of nowhere. Liara and Tali dodged it but it hit Austin right in the shoulder. Fortunately his upgraded shields absorbed the impact without any damage. Everyone instantly drew their weapons to where the shot had fired from.

"We know your hiding there! Show yourself!" Austin ordered.

Very slowly, a young woman came out of hiding. When she saw them she instantly put her gun down.
"Damn it! I'm so sorry. I thought you were Geth, or another one of those Varren." She said apologetically.

Austin, Liara and Tali lowered their guns.

"It's okay. You're safe now. Are you Lizbeth Baynham?" Austin asked.

"Yeah. How'd you know?" Lizbeth asked.

"Your mother told me to search for you. She's been very worried about you. She'll be overjoyed to know you're safe. But why were you here in the first place?" Austin asked.

"It's my own fault. Everyone else was running and I stayed to back up data. I was trapped. I tried to get out, but the way was blocked." Lizbeth replied.

"We'll get you out. But first we need to find out what the Geth are after." Said Austin.

"It's not the Geth; it's the energy field they put up. They don't want anyone else getting access to the-" Lizbeth hesitated at that point and didn't finish.

"Lizbeth, it's important we know every detail. It's critical that we find out what the Geth are after." Said Austin.

"I don't know for certain, but I'm guessing they're here for the Thorian." Said Lizbeth.

"What's a Thorian?" Tali asked.

"It's an indigenous life-form. ExoGeni was studying it." Lizbeth replied.

"What else do you know? Where is the Thorian?" Austin asked.

"I think I might. But I don't think I can show you with all these Geth everywhere. We need to get past the field." Lizbeth answered.

"Do you have any idea what's causing that field?" Austin asked.

"It has to be the Geth ship. There's no other explanation." Said Lizbeth.

"Okay. You say here for now. We've got some doors to open." Said Austin.

Before they could leave however Lizbeth quickly stopped them. "Here, take my ID. This should get you past any locked doors." She said as she handed Austin her ID which he then scanned using his wrist computer.

There were quite a few Varren and more Geth in the tunnels but wasn't anything that the team couldn't handle. As they were climbing some stairs however they could hear what sounded like a Krogan voice.

"Stupid machine! Access encrypted files! No, I don't want to review protocol!" it said.

As they reached the top they could see the Krogan. His back was turned to them and he appeared to be arguing with a VI.

"I am unable to comply. Please contact your supervisor." Said the VI politely.

"Damn it! Tell me what I want or I'll blast your virtual ass into actual dust!" the Krogan ordered.
"Please contact your supervisor for a level 4 security exemption or make an appointment with-.

"Stupid machine!" the Krogan shouted.

"If there is nothing else, please step aside. There is a queue forming behind you for the use of this console." Said the VI.

The Krogan turned around and spotted them.

"Damn it!" Austin thought. "There goes a sneak attack."

"Oh good. I really need to kill someone!" said the Krogan. However he didn't count on Liara who simply flung him aside with a powerful biotic push.

"Remind me never to get on your bad side, Liara." Said Tali.

As the group walked up to the VI it noticed them.

"ExoGeni Corporation reminds all staff that the discharging of weapon while on company property is strictly forbidden." It said. "Welcome back, Research Assistant Elizabeth Baynham. What can I do for you?"

"What information was the Krogan user attempting to access?" Austin asked.

"The previous user was attempting to access details on the study of Subject Species 37, the Thorian."

"What information do you have on the Thorian?" Austin asked.

"There has been no new data available on species 37. All sensors monitoring the observation post at Zhu's Hope have been inactive for several cycles." The VI replied.

Austin wasn't sure if he'd heard right.

"What does Zhu's Hope have to do with the Thorian?" he inquired.

"Species 37 is located within the substructure of the Zhu's Hope outpost." Said VI.

Now it made sense to Austin. Saren wanted the Thorian, and so that was why the Geth were here.

"Okay, tell me everything you know about the Thorian." he said to the VI.

"The Thorian is a simple plant life form that exhibits a sentient behaviour uncommon with other flora. Through dispersion and the eventual inhalation of spores, it can infect and control other organisms, including humans. The Zhu's Hope control group has yielded interesting results. Before sensors went offline, almost 85% of all test subjects were infected." Said the VI

"Wait. You're telling me that ExoGeni knew about Zhu's Hope being infected?!" Austin asked, slightly horrified.

"It was deemed necessary to assess the true potential of Species 37." The VI replied.

"I guess now the strange behaviour of the colonists makes sense now. We should inform your pilot." Said Tali.

Austin nodded in agreement and activated his wrist communicator.
"Joker, come in. Joker? Damn it! That field's blocking communication as well." He said.

"We'll have to disable that drop ship if we're going to get out of here." Said Tali.

"No argument there. VI, what can you tell me about the Geth ship and the field its generating?" Austin asked.

"I have limited data on the Geth. They have effectively blocked all sensors within the facility. I have detected unusual power fluctuations, but am unable to determine the source." The VI replied.

"That's enough for now," Said Austin. He then turned to his squad mates. "Come on. We've got a drop ship to destroy."

Getting to the drop ship was really not easy. There were even more Geth than before. As they continued to fight through the Geth put up more of a fight. Finally they caught a break from the Geth and saw what they were looking for. From what they could see, there was a massive claw which was attached to the building through the shuttle bay and linked to the Geth drop ship.

"That makes things easier. We destroy that claw; the others won't be able to support all the weight." Said Austin.

"True. But I fear we do not have the needed gear to destroy this claw. We will have to keep looking." Said Liara

Fortunately they didn't need to look far. There was a control panel nearby. Unfortunately there was more Geth nearby, and to make matters worse, the Terror Geth was with them.

"Intruders! Destroy them!" it ordered.

The team instantly dove for cover as the Geth fired on them. Despite this though they were still able to gun down the Geth. The Terror Geth fired several shots, one of which hit the cover that Liara was behind, which sent her flying. Furious at this, Austin charged at the Terror Geth.

"You'll pay for that!" he yelled. As he charged he grabbed the Terror Geth and headed straight for the wall. One thing he didn't count on though was how fragile the wall was. The whole thing fell away as Austin charged the Terror Geth into it. Just in time, Austin managed to grab onto the ledge. Liara rushed over to him and helped to pull him up.

"Austin, are you alright?" she asked.

"I'm fine. I just didn't know the wall was that fragile." Austin replied. After recovering from the small shock, he walked back up to the hole he had just caused. He looked down. There was no sign of the Terror Geth and he really doubted that the Geth could survive a fall that far. Even a Helldiver wouldn't survive a jump that high. Confident now that he wouldn't have to deal with the Terror Geth again, Austin walked up to a nearby control panel. Upon close inspection he saw that it was in fact the controls for the shuttle bay.

"Tali? If the shuttle bay door closes with enough force, could that be enough to crush that claw?" Austin asked.

"If enough pressure is applied, it might just work." Tali answered.

"Right. Cover me." Said Austin while he began fiddling with the door switch. After several attempts he finally got the pressure high enough. The shuttle bay door slammed right into the claw. The sheer force of the door crushed it completely. There was the unmistakable sound of crushing metal and the
whole building rumbled as the drop ship fell away.

"Well done! Our way should be clear now. We can go address this Thorian issue." Said Liara.

At that very moment though the radio finally crackled back into life.

"I repeat, Normandy to shore party. Are you reading? Anyone there? Normandy to shore party. Come on, Commander, talk to me!" came Joker's voice.

"Is that you, Joker? What's going on over there?" Austin asked urgently.

"We're in lockdown here, Commander. Something's happened to the colonists. They're clawing at the hull of the ship!" Joker replied.

"Just keep them out of the ship for now. They can't do any real damage. We're on our way back. Just hold your position." Austin ordered. He then turned back to his squad mates. "With the Geth drop ship gone; this place will be crawling with Geth in a minute. Stand together and we'll make it out of here!" he said.

Fortunately for them the path back to where they had left Lizbeth was completely clear. When they reached the entrance back to where they'd left Lizbeth and the Mako, they found her waiting for them.

"There you are!" she greeted. "We should get out of here. I don't think this place is safe."

"First things first. You owe us an explanation. You didn't tell us every single detail that you knew about the Thorian." Said Austin. The tone of his voice could tell he was cross with Lizbeth.

"I—I was afraid. I wanted to stop the tests, but they threatened me, told me I'd be next." Lizbeth stuttered. "When the Geth attacked, I stayed behind to send a message to Colonial Affairs. I tried to tell them where to find the Thorian, but the power cut before I could send the message. I— I never meant for this to happen."

"You did what you could. Tell me where to find the Thorian and I promise I'll do all I can to save everyone." Said Austin.

"The Thorian is underneath Zhu's Hope, but the entrance is blocked. The colonists covered it with the freighter just before the Geth attacked." Said Lizbeth.

"But why are the Geth after the Thorian? What could Saren want with it?" Austin asked.

"Well, it does have unique mind-controlling capabilities. That's what ExoGeni was interested in." said Lizbeth.

At that moment the radio cracked into life again.

"Normandy to shore party. Come in." came Joker's voice.

"What is it, Joker?" said Austin.

"There's Geth chatter all over the place. Sounds like they're heading your way." Said Joker.

"Then we'd better get out of here. Let's move out." Said Austin.

"I'm coming with you! I might be able to help. Undo the mess I help create." Said Lizbeth.
True enough there where Geth on the skyway. Luckily for them they were just Geth troopers, so Austin simply ran them over. As they neared the settlement where they planned to drop Lizbeth off however, they intercepted another transmission.

"… Anybody. Is there anyone picking this up?" it said. It was Juliana's voice.

"Get away from that radio!" came Jeong's voice.

"What was that all about?" asked Lizbeth.

"I'm not sure. But we're going to find out." Austin replied.

"… This is Juliana Baynham of Feros colony. Please help us…” came Juliana's voice again before the transmission cut off.


Austin hit the brakes and Lizbeth climbed out of the Mako. Rather coincidently they had stopped just outside the entrance to the settlement. Austin, Liara and Tali quickly followed. Austin had a rather bad feeling about this. They knelt down at the entrance. From what they could see Jeong appeared to be really stressed and Juliana was arguing with him.

"You can't do this, Jeong!" Juliana shouted.

"Everyone shut up! Let me think!" Jeong shouted back, clearly panicking.

"What's going on?" Lizbeth whispered.

Austin merely put his finger to where his mouth should have been, had he not been wearing his helmet, and motioned for her to keep quiet.

"You won't get away with this." Said Juliana as a guard seized her and started to drag her away.

"Get her out of here!" Jeong ordered.

Lizbeth reacted to this and bolted out of cover.

"Get away from her, you son of a bitch!" she yelled.

Austin tried to stop Lizbeth, but he was too late. Juliana looked to the voice and saw her.

"Lizbeth!" she said as she broke free of the guards and hugged her daughter.

"Damn it! Come out where I can see you! All of you!" Jeong ordered.

Austin turned to Liara and Tali. They hadn't seen him yet and that gave him an idea.

"Whatever happens just tell them the Geth killed me." He said.

"What? Why?" Tali asked, confused.

"I'll stay cloaked. I doubt this can end well." Austin replied. "Just say that I was killed and play along with this. I'll be right behind you, I promise."

Liara and Tali nodded and walked out to where Jeong could see them. Liara caught one last glimpse at Austin before he activated his cloak and vanished from site.
"Where's Shepard?!"] Jeong demanded.

"He's dead. The Geth killed him." Liara answered.

Lizbeth was about to object, but Austin quickly stopped her and whispered into her ear.

"Play along with this, Lizbeth. Please, trust me." He said.

Lizbeth quickly hesitated and then went along with Austin's plan. She felt his hand let go of her shoulder.

"Yeah. There were too many Geth. He sacrificed himself for us." She said.

Austin slowly moved closer to Jeong. He was careful not to move and stay out of Jeong's eyesight. If he got too close Jeong would see the ripples of his camouflage and his cover would be blown. His heart was beating very fast in his chest but he made sure to breathe slowly and steady and keep his adrenalin under control.

"We can talk this out. No one needs to get hurt." Said Tali.

"You don't understand. It's not that easy. Communications are back up. ExoGeni wants this place purged." Said Jeong, still nervous.

Austin made sure to stay behind Jeong. He didn't need to worry about Jeong hearing him. The Tactical cloak muffled out the sound of his footsteps and his breathing. He made sure to be ready to act fast. If Jeong became hostile, then he would intervene. If the matter was resolved peacefully though he would reappear at the entrance and make up an excuse that he managed to survive the Geth. At the moment however, it didn't look like Jeong was going to back down.

"This is a human colony, Jeong! You can't just re-purpose us!" said Lizbeth, angrily.

"It's not just you. There's something here far more valuable than a few colonists." Said Jeong.

Austin quickly moved behind Liara.

"Tell them all about the Thorian." He whispered to her.

"You're after the one thing unique to Feros: The Thorian." Said Liara.

Austin moved back behind Jeong, tensing himself to be ready for anything sudden.

"The what?" Juliana asked, confused.

"It's a telepathic life-form living under Zhu's Hope. It's taking control of the colonists there. ExoGeni knew all along." Lizbeth answered.

"You won't get away with this, Jeong!" said Juliana.

"So you keep saying. But nobody's going to miss a few colonists!" Jeong yelled as he pointed his gun at Juliana.

Austin instantly reacted.

"They won't miss you either!" Austin yelled.

Jeong instantly whirled round to see Austin uncloak right in front of him. He fired his gun at Austin
gut the shot merely bounced off of him. Before Jeong could fire again, Austin grabbed his wrist and twisted it hard. Jeong screamed in pain as the Helldiver broke his wrist and his gun dropped from his hand. With Jeong disarmed, Austin let go and let Jeong fall to the floor, clutching his broken wrist in pain.

"You're not hurting any of these people anymore!" said Austin.

"Commander? But… how?" said Juliana.

"I knew this couldn't end well. So I cloaked. I was never dead to begin with." Austin answered.

Austin was a bit surprised that the other guards didn't draw their weapons on him. But then he had just materialised out of thin air and disarmed their leader in seconds. The rest of the colonists just stared at him, a look of fright on their faces. Suddenly the Guards then did react but Tali pulled out her Shotgun, Liara's biotics glowed all over her and Austin drew his rifle on them.

"Don't even try it! Drop your weapons, now!" he ordered.

The Guards reluctantly obeyed, slowly put their weapons on the ground and raised their hands in surrender. Jeong however was having none of it. Using his left hand he picked up his gun. Before he could point it at Austin however, the Helldiver reacted by activating his omni blade and stabbing Jeong in the chest.

"I warned you, you son of a bitch!" he hissed as he let Jeong collapse on the floor.

"As if we didn't have enough problems. Now we're shooting each other in the back." Said Juliana.

Austin, Liara and Tali relaxed and holstered their weapons. Austin still kept an eye on the guards in case they tried anything.

"It's my fault. I knew what was going on and I didn't do anything." Said Lizbeth.

"Don't you start, dear. You do good work and you know it." Said Juliana reassuringly. She then turned back to Austin. "So what now, Commander?"

"My comrades and I are going to deal with this Thorian, then we'll make sure you're safe." Austin answered.

"The colonists won't let you near the Thorian. They'd die first. They're under its' control." Said Juliana.

"I'm sorry. But we don't have any other choice." Said Austin.

"You can't just kill them. It's not their fault. There's got to be another way." Lizbeth objected.

Julian thought for a moment.

"I think there is. You could safely use a nerve agent to neutralize the colonists."

"You mean, put them to sleep?" Austin asked.

"Exactly. You could use something like a Gas grenade!" said Lizbeth.

Austin took a moment to ponder this.

"Actually, that might work. We're all wearing helmets, so we won't get caught in the blast. I'll do
what I can.” He said as he unclipped several sleeping gas grenades from his armour and handed half of them to Tali and the other half to Liara.

"Excellent. Thank you so much, Commander." Said Juliana.

"We'll stay out of your way until you clear a path. Good luck." Said Lizbeth.

Now equipped to handle the colonists, the three climbed into the Mako and set off.

Oddly, the skyway was completely clear. There was no sign of any Geth.

"That's odd. I thought there'd be more Geth here." Said Austin.

"Geth don't retreat without good reason." Said Tali.

Suddenly another huge Geth drop ship flew right above the Skyway. It fired several shots at them. Austin weaved about a bit and managed to avoid them, but he was struggling.

"Tali! Take the wheel!" he ordered. "I'm gonna give them a taste of their own medicine."

Austin unbuckled himself from his seat and headed to the currently unoccupied turret seat. Tali quickly did the same and bolted herself into the driver's seat. As the Geth ship continued to fire at the Mako, Austin fired back using the Mako's turret. Several shots hit the drop ship, some even managed to cripple it slightly. Tali meanwhile, was really having to concentrate. If one shot hit the Mako, it would flip them over and there would be no guarantee that they could get it back up again. As Tali continued evading fire from the drop ship, Austin continued firing. Then he spotted a weak spot on the Geth drop ship. Without hesitating, he fired. The shot hit the ship and it started to spin out of control. As it did, Austin could see a lone Geth emerge from the ship and cling to it. He couldn't tell what type it was though, but he guessed it was a rocket trooper. Still, he doubted that Geth could land a clear shot.

Austin however was very wrong. This was not a rocket trooper. It was the Terror Geth. Unknown to Austin, as the Terror Geth had fallen it had managed to cling to one of the lower levels of the skyscraper. From there it had worked its way back up and had signalled for another drop ship to pick it up. From there it was a simple matter of finding the Helldiver again. As the Terror Geth clung to the spinning drop ship it saw the Mako. It tried to target but the ships spinning prevented it from getting a clear shot. Then however the drop ship scraped against the side of the skyway it had been hovering over and stopped spinning. It was brief, but the Terror Geth reacted very fast. It growled angrily as it charged up its plasma blaster. Quicker than any other Geth would've managed, it locked on, and fired. The blast soared toward the Mako. The Terror Geth however lost sight of it as the drop ship plummeted out of the sky. Just when it seemed like these was no escape however the Terror Geth suddenly found itself separated from the crashing drop ship and watched as it disappeared from sight into the clouds. The Terror Geth looked up and saw that it had been caught in some of the skyway's suspension cables. Although it had been a lucky escape however, the cables where tangled everywhere and where very tight. It could take to free itself. But the Terror Geth was very patient. It was still functional and that's what mattered.

Back on the skyway Austin was cheering as he watched the drop ship disappear from sight. His celebration however where premature as he noticed the plasma blast too late. Before he could warn his comrades, the blast hit the ground right in front Mako's front right wheel, narrowly missing it. Unfortunately though, despite that there was no damage, the sheer force of the plasma blast was still enough to flip the Mako over. It landed upside down on the skyway with a loud crunch and unfortunately for Austin, he hadn't secured his safety on the turret seat. The force of the impact sent
him flying past Liara and Tali and right through the Mako's windscreen. As the Mako screeched as it slowly stopped, Austin desperately tried to grab something to stop him. To make matters worse, the direction he'd been flung in was over the edge of the skyway. The Mako finally screeched to halt, still upside down, but Austin was still flying. He still tried, but nothing he did even slowed him down. He looked at the edge. It was even closer than he'd thought. He could already feel himself falling off the skyway. Just at the very last minute though, his right hand hooked onto the edge of the skyway. Without even taking a minute to hesitate, Austin tightened his grip. He felt himself stop abruptly and his whole arm felt as if it had been wrenched out of its socket. After a few seconds, he regained his composure. He looked and saw what his hand had grabbed onto. He quickly flung his other hand up and grabbed onto the edge. Summoning up all the strength he and his armour could muster, he pulled himself until he was able to move his right hand and grip onto another bit of the edge. However the next bit wasn't as easy to grab onto and he could feel himself slipping. He looked up slightly and saw the Mako, completely overturned. Apart from the hole in the windscreen that he had just flown out of, it looked like it would still run if could be turned back over. He saw the hatch open and Liara and Tali crawled out. As far as he could tell, they looked fine. They looked around trying to find their Commander.

"Austin!" Liara called.

"Over here!" Austin yelled back. "Hurry! I'm slipping! I can't hold on much longer!"

Liara and Tali instantly noticed and rushed over to him. They both grabbed a hand each just before Austin lost his grip and pulled him up. Austin took a moment to catch his breath.

"Austin, are you alright?!" Liara asked urgently.

"I'm fine. Just a bit shocked." Austin answered. After getting his breath back he stood up and looked at the overturned Mako.

"Can we get that back up?" he asked.

"If we all push hard enough, we just might be able to." Tali answered.

"I may be able to help with my biotics as well." Said Liara.

Austin and Tali both lifted the Mako as hard as they could while Liara concentrated with all her might. A blue biotic field appeared around the Mako. After several hard pushes and enough biotic strength, the Mako finally flipped back over and landed the right way up.

"Let's not do that again." Said Liara as they all climbed back in.

As the Mako drove off into the distance, a large Geth hand appeared from over the edge and hauled it's body up. The Terror Geth had finally managed to free itself. It watched the Mako disappear. Once again, the Helldiver had survived his encounter with it and the army was decimated. No matter though. There was one more ship still on the planet. The Terror Geth could use that to get of this planet. Even with the remaining Geth, the chance of the winning this now where very, very low. For now they would have to retreat and repair. But it would have another chance. Next time, Shepard would not be so lucky.

After a short drive the Mako reached the door that would take them back to Zhu's hope. As the team got out though they found a strange looking humanoid figure standing in front of them. It looked zombified. At first, Austin thought it was a Husk and drew his rifle at it. On closer inspection though he saw that it was in fact completely different. It looked like a decayed corpse. It had no eyes and long claws for fingers. As soon as it saw Austin it lunged at him. Austin immediately acted on
instinct and gunned it down. It fell to the floor, completely lifeless. They all walked up to the body and examined it closer.

"No amount of infection could have altered a human to that extent. I wonder what is going on here?" said Liara.

"Okay, listen. Kill these things, but no hitting the colonists, even if the Thorian makes them fire on us. That's what the gas grenades are for." Austin ordered as he indicated to the grenades he'd handed to them earlier.

"As you order, Shepard." Said Liara. Tali also nodded in agreement.

As they opened the door, even more of those creeper monsters where waiting for them. The group gunned them all down instantly and made sure to check their targets in case one of them ended up being a colonist. As they neared the elevator, two colonists fired at them. Liara unclipped one of the gas grenades from her armour and threw it at them. The colonists only had a minute to react before they inhaled the sleeping gas and where knocked out.

"Good throw, Liara." Said Austin.

Liara blushed slightly behind her mask at Austin comment.

As they exited the elevator they ran into even more Thorian creepers and the colonists. The sleeping gas didn't affect the creepers so it was at least easier for the group to pick their targets. After a long and very gory fight the whole colony was asleep and all was quite. Austin walked over to the controls for what looked like the secret entrance to the Thorian's lair. He couldn't help but feel as though he was forgetting something though. Then he suddenly heard footsteps. He saw Fai Dan limping towards him, gun in hand. Austin pointed his gun at Fai Dan but didn't fire yet. He could tell that the man was trying to fight the Thorian's control over him.

"I tried to fight it, but it gets in your head. You can't imagine the pain." Fai Dan struggled to say. "I was supposed to be their leader. These people trusted me."

Fai Dan pointed his gun at Austin. Still though, Austin didn't fire yet. Not until Fai Dan shot first.

"It wants me to stop you… but I… I won't." said Fai Dan.

Very slowly he forced his gun arm to aim at his head.

"I won't!" he shouted, and then he pulled the trigger. Blood splattered out of Fai Dan's head and he fell to the floor.

Austin holstered his assault rifle and went up to the controls. A section of one of the buildings lifted up and revealed a passageway leading under the colony.

"Come on. Let's finish this." Said Austin, and with that the group slowly descended the stairs. Their next stop: The Thorian's lair.

To be continued...

Next chapter... Chamber of the Thorian.

Be warned that Chapter 11 will contain nudity.
Like to also clarify that the armour that Liara is now wearing is the same armour that she wears at the very beginning of Mass Effect 2 when the Normandy is attacked. I just felt like doing something new. Plus it also explains where she got the armour from. Hope that clears things up.
Chapter 11, The Chamber of The Thorian

Warning! Chapter contains nudity at the beginning and more nudity and sex later on. Also is a bit gory.

Hope you enjoy it.

Chapter 11

The Chamber of The Thorian

As the group descended the stairs, they couldn't help but feel a growing feeling of dread. Already they could tell they weren't alone down here. Austin activated his thermal vision to try and pinpoint the Thorian's exact location, but all he could see was huge areas of orange.

"Keep your guard up, you two." He said to Liara and Tali. "There's defiantly something alive down here. My heat vision's going crazy."

The came to end of the hallway, they could see what looked like a massive chamber. The orange areas of Austin's heat vision only got redder. Clearly he wouldn't be able to see, so he turned it off. As they entered the chamber, they finally saw the Thorian, face to face.

"All right, we just need to find this creature and determine what… what it…" said Liara as she saw the Thorian. "Goddess. That is… disturbing."

What they saw in front of them, was what looked like a massive plant of some kind. The main bit of the Thorian had what looked like a face with long slimy tentacles coming out of its mouth. Goo and slime dripped from the mouth, it was not a pleasant sight. The massive body was held in place by several long arms that appeared to be fused to multiple parts of the chamber. The massive heat blooms made perfect sense now. I living, breathing plant this size would indeed cover the entire chamber.

"I've seen a lot of things my years. But that does not look like any plant I've ever seen. This may be… problematic." Said Austin, nervously.

As they approached the Thorian it seemed to take notice of them and started to pulse. Even more slime and goo started to drip from the Thorian's mouth. Then suddenly it almost seemed to give birth to something, something that was clearly moving.

"Uuugh! That is disgusting." Said Austin. He felt as though he was going to be sick inside his helmet. He knew he wasn't though. He had seen far more disgusting things. Hell, he'd seen one man ripped completely in half by a Thresher Maw and another be completely dissolved by acid. Still, that didn't help the nauseous feeling in his stomach and he could tell they others where slightly repulsed by the sight.

Once the Thorian's tentacles cleared they could see that it was an Asari. Unlike all other Asari though, this one was green. In all his life Austin had never seen or heard of a green Asari. If he was honest though that wasn't that most noticeable feature of the Asari. What was really noticeable was that the Asari was completely naked. As the nude Asari slowly stood up, the rest of her of her body came into view. Austin found it difficult not to stare at rather large breasts. Austin had seen bigger, but the sight was not unwelcome. However as the nude, green Asari stood up fully, the group was
met with a rather disgusting sight. In place of the where the Asari's vagina should have been was a mottled mess that looked like a fleshy mound of rotted leaves, much like the Thorian itself.

"I really hope that is not real." Austin thought to himself.

"Invaders! Your every step is a transgression. A thousand feelers appraise you as meat, good only to dig or decompose." Said the Asari intimidatingly. "I speak for the old growth, as I did for Saren. You are within and before the Thorian. It commands that you be in awe!"

"No offense. But if you're trying to scare us, you're not doing a very good job of it. I find it very hard to be frightened of a green, naked Asari." Said Austin, trying his best not to laugh. He quickly turned his head to Liara. "No offense, Liara." He said.

Liara giggled and blushed slightly. "None taken." She replied.

Austin turned back to the naked Asari clone.

"You gave something to Saren. Something I need." He said.

"Saren sought knowledge of those who are gone. The Old Growth listened to flesh for the first time in the Long Cycle. Trades were made." Said the Asari clone. "Then cold ones began killing the flesh that would tend the next cycle. Flesh fairly given! The Old Growth sees the air you push as lies! It will listen no more!"

"I won't let you keep your thralls or enslave the colonist's minds. Release them. Now!" Austin demanded.

"No more will the Thorian listen to those that scurry. Your lives are short, but have gone on too long. Your blood will feed the ground and the new growth!" said the Asari clone.

Austin wasn't afraid of this at all and was unable to contain his laughter.

"Oh I'm so scared." He said sarcastically. "What are you gonna do? Kill me with a naked Asari dance or something? You're completely nude. You haven't got any weapons, we have."

Austin however had forgotten that all Asari where natural biotics. The naked Asari clone glowed completely blue and stretched out her hand. Immediately, all three of them where sent flying into the wall.

"Right! That's it! No more Mr Nice Guy!" said Austin as he got up. He unholstered his combat knife and threw it at the Asari Clone.

The knife flew so fast that the Asari clone didn't have enough time to react. The knife stabbed right into the valley between her breasts. She was dead within seconds. The team slowly got up. Liara then noticed one of the Thorian's long arms attached to a nearby wall.

"Austin, look. There's something here. A growth of some kind." She said as she indicated to the growth.

Austin looked to where she had pointed. He paused a moment, then opened fire on it. The whole thing seemed to explode and Austin could tell it was no longer sticking to the wall. The Thorian screamed in pain.

"Ooooh! That had to hurt. If we get the rest, it's finished." Said Austin.
As they proceeded up the stairs to the next level, Austin saw the Thorian pulse again. Then it suddenly gave birth to another green, naked Asari clone. They quickly moved to the second level. Before they could fire however lots of Thorian creepers appeared, as did the Asari Clone. But it was nothing that they couldn't handle. As the Thorian continued making naked asari clones and sending Thorian creepers at them, Austin, Liara and Tali battled their way through. After what felt like hours they finally managed to destroy the last arm. They heard the Thorian roar in pain. All the arms slowly ripped off of the walls and the Thorian plummeted down the camber. It was a long drop. No way could it survive that fall. The squad looked at what was left of the Thorian. To say they were filthy was an understatement.

"Ugh! I've got Thorian goo all my armour and weapons." groaned Austin. "I just had it all cleaned a few days ago. The decontamination's going to have a field day with this."

He once again stole a look at Liara. Even with the gunk all over her, she seemed to glow with her natural beauty.

"I'm going to need a bath after this." She said. From behind her helmet she winked at Austin, who gave a small nod. He understood very well what she meant. At that moment, one of the Thorian pods on the wall suddenly split open and out of it dropped another Asari. Like the clones, she too was nude and her face tattoos where the same. However her skin pigment was a different colour. She was purple. Also, as far as Austin could see, she didn't have a Thorian vagina either. Very slowly she got up and huddled into a crouched position. When she noticed the squad in front of her she did her best to cover up her nakedness. Like them, she was also covered in Thorian goo and slime. She then looked around at her surroundings, then at herself.

"I'm free!" she said. Her voice was exactly the same as the clones, but she sounded relieved. As though she'd just woken up from a nightmare. "Tha… Thank you for releasing me."

Austin and his comrades lowered their weapons. Austin turned to Tali.

"Find something to clothe her." He ordered.

Tali nodded and rushed off to try and find something to cover the nude Asari. Austin walked up to her and knelt down in front of her. It was easier for him to focus on her face since she was covering breasts and vagina.

"Is everything alright? Are you hurt?" he asked.

"I am fine. Or I will be, in time. My name is Shiala. I serve—I served Matriarch Benezia. When she allied herself with Saren, so did I. Benezia foresaw the influence Saren would have. She joined him to guide him down a gentler path. But Saren is compelling. Benezia lost her way." Shiala replied.

After a short while, Tali returned with what looked like a large blanket. She handed it to Austin who wrapped it around Shiala and slowly helped her to stand up. He then stood back and allowed her to stand up on her own.

"Are you saying Saren can control minds?" Austin asked.

"Benezia underestimated Saren. As I did. We came to believe in his cause and his goals. The strength of his influence is troubling." Shiala replied.

"Benezia sought to turn the river and was swept away." Said Liara.

"Asari Matriarchs are among the most intelligent and powerful beings in the galaxy. How could one fall under Saren's control?" Austin asked.
"Saren has a vessel. An enormous warship unlike anything I've ever seen. He calls it Sovereign. It can dominate the minds of his followers. They become indoctrinated to Saren's will. The process is subtle. It can take days, weeks. But in the end, it is absolute. I was a willing slave when Saren brought me to this world. He needed my biotics to communicate with the Thorian, to learn its secrets. Saren offered me in trade. I was sacrificed to secure an Alliance between Saren and the Thorian. My own friends stripped me of my clothes and forced me into the Thorian. That was how it managed to create those clones of me. The clones that you had the misfortune of running into. I apologize for their nudity but the Thorian didn't understand the concept of clothes and I was given to the Thorian naked." Said Shiala.

"Saren's pretty quick to betray his own followers." Said Austin.

"He was quick to betray the Thorian, too. After he had what he wanted, he ordered the Geth to destroy all evidence of its existence. Saren now knows that you are searching for the Conduit as well. He knows you are following his steps. He attacked the Thorian so you could not gain the Cipher." Said Shiala.


"You remember the beacon on Eden Prime? It gave you visions, yes?" Shiala asked.

"Yeah. But despite everything, I haven't been able to make much sense of it. All I see are flashes, and blurry images." Austin replied.

"That is because they were meant for a Prothean mind. To truly comprehend them, you must think like a Prothean. You must understand their culture, their history, their very existence." Said Shiala.

"That sounds like something Liara would love to know." Austin joked. Liara chuckled slightly and blushed. This was becoming quite a habit for her.

"The Thorian was here long before the Protheans built this city. It watched and studied them. When they died, it consumed them. They became a part of it." Said Shiala.

"So the Thorian taught Saren to think like Prothean? How?" asked Liara.

"The Cipher is the very essence of being a Prothean. It cannot be described or explained. It would be like describing colour to a creature without eyes. To understand, you must have access to endemic ancestral memory. A viewpoint spanning thousands of Prothean generations. I sensed this ancestral memory—the Cipher—when I melded with the Thorian. Our identities merged, our minds intertwined. Such knowledge cannot be taught; it simply exists." Shiala replied.

"Then we need that knowledge if we're to stop Saren! Is there any way you can give me this, Cipher?" Austin asked.

"There is a way. I can transfer the knowledge from my mind to yours, as I did with Saren." Said Shiala.

"Are you sure about this, Austin?" Liara asked with a look of concern on her face.

"It's the only way, Liara. Don't worry. You said so yourself, I'm remarkably strong willed." Austin reassured her. He turned back to Shiala. She walked up to him.

"I'll need you to remove your helmet, Commander." She said.

Austin removed his helmet and handed it to Liara. He then turned to Shiala and nodded to her.
"Try to relax, Commander. Slow, deep breaths. Let go of your physical shell. Reach out to grasp the threads that blind us, one is another." She said soothingly.

Austin did his best to relax and let his mind go blank. He breathed slowly and steadily.

"Every action sends ripples across the galaxy. Every idea must touch another mind to live. Each emotion must mark another's spirit." Shiala continued.

Austin slowly closed his eyes and began to relax even more as he heard nothing but Shiala words of comfort. Shiala reached up and held his face in her hands, looking straight at his closed eyes. As she did, the blanket she and been wearing fell away, once again revealing her purple, naked body. Despite this though she didn't seem to care and Austin didn't notice since his eyes where closed.

"We are all connected. Every living being united in a single, glorious existence. Open yourself to the universe, Commander. Embrace Eternity!" she said.

Shiala closed her eyes and they then re-opened a solid black as their nervous systems became one. Once again the Prothean visions flashed before Austin's eyes. This time though they seemed different, clearer and less brief. They were still the same however. Reapers wiping out Protheans. After a while, it ceased. Austin found himself back in reality. Shiala stepped back slightly, as she did; she picked up the blanket and once again covered up her nakedness with it. Austin found his head throbbing again.

"I have given you the Cipher, just as it was given to Saren. The ancestral memories of the Protheans are a part of you now." She said.

"A knowledge bond can be very traumatic. Are you alright, Austin?" asked Liara.

"Just a minor headache. I'll be fine. I saw… something. It still didn't make any sense." Said Austin.

"You have been given a great gift: the experience of an entire people. It will take time for your mind to process this information." Said Shiala.

"We should get you back to the ship where you can be monitored." Said Liara.

"I am sorry if you have suffered, but there was no other way. You needed the Cipher. In time, it will help you understand the vision from the beacon." Said Shiala.

"Now that you're free of the Thorian, what are you planning to do next?" Austin asked.

"If you allow it, I would like to stay here with the colonists. They have suffered greatly; and I played a role in their suffering. I would like to make amends." Shiala replied.

"That's a very noble idea. The colonists will need all the help they can get. They'll be happy to have you on their side." Said Austin. "Although you might want to find some clothes first. Not sure the colonists will take you seriously if you're naked."

"I couldn't agree more. But thank you, Shepard. May fortune smile upon you." Said Shiala as she followed Austin and his team out of the chamber.

"You did it. With the Thorian gone, we can start rebuilding for ourselves again, and we're free of ExoGeni's threats. We're back to being just a little nowhere colony. Thank you, Commander." Said Juliana.
Austin and his team had now returned to the surface. They had left Shiala to be checked and examined by one of the doctors. A minute later, Austin saw her step out of the building. She'd been cleaned of the Thorian goo and was now properly dressed in a traditional Asari commando outfit.

"Good to see that you've got some clothes now, Shiala." Said Austin. "You okay?"

"Yes. It feels good to finally be cleaned of the Thorian's entrails and to finally have some clothes on again." Shiala replied. "I will do what I can to assist the colony in this difficult time. I am ashamed of the damage done to the lives of these people."

"I wish you good luck. Farewell, Shiala." Said Austin.

"Farewell, Commander. I wish you well in your hunt." Said Shiala.

With that, Austin, Liara and Tali headed back to the Normandy, and a long decontamination.

"Commander? You look… pale. Are you suffering any ill effects from the Cipher?" asked Liara, a hint of concern in her voice.

After what had indeed been a long decontamination the crew had finally gathered back in the comm room. Austin still had his armour on, but it at least was clean now and not all sticky.

"The Cipher shook me up a bit and my heads still throbbing, but I'll be okay. I've had a lot worse than this." Austin replied.

"I might be able to help you. I am an expert on the Protheans. If I join my consciousness to yours, maybe we can make more sense of it." Liara suggested.

"If you're certain. Then go ahead." Said Austin.

Both Austin and Liara stood up. Austin removed his helmet again and placed it on his seat. He then walked up to Liara. She gently placed her hand on his head, just as Shiala had done earlier. Austin relaxed instantly at her touch. The feeling of her touching him was very pleasing.

"Relax, Shepard. Embrace Eternity!" said Liara.

Just as before, Liara's eyes closed and then opened again completely black. As before the visions flashed before Austin's eyes. This time they didn't happen so fast, but still it was hard to make out. Then it ended even quicker than before. Austin couldn't help but feel as though there was more to it than that.

"That was incredible! All this time. All my research. Yet I never dreamed… I'm sorry. The images were so vivid. I never imagined the experience would be so… intense. As I said before, you are remarkably strong willed, Shepard. What you've been through, what you've seen, would have destroyed a lesser mind." Said Liara.

"Did you find anything useful?" Austin asked.

"The beacon on Eden Prime must have been badly damaged. Large parts of the vision are missing. The data transferred into your mind is incomplete." Said Liara.

"Saren must have the missing information. Maybe he found another beacon." Austin suggested.

"That seems like the logical conclusion. If we can find the missing data from your vision, I can— oohh!" said Liara. Once again she looked tired. The mind meld had obviously affected her a bit.
"You probably need a lie down. I can tell that tired you out a bit." Said Austin. He then turned back to the rest of the crew. "We're done here. Dismissed."

"I've sent off the Feros report, Commander. You want me to patch you through to the Council?" Joker asked through radio as everyone left the comm room.

"Patch them through." Said Austin as he fastened his helmet back on. He felt it better that the Council heard rather than see his reactions. He could tell that the Turian councillor in particular was trying to get him to snap. The helmet at least hid his expressions and he only had to concentrate on sounding polite.

The three holograms of the Council once again appeared before him.

"Commander. ExoGeni should've told us about the Thorian. It would've made your job much easier." Said the Asari.

"You might have been able to capture it for study instead of destroying it." Said the Salarian.

"That would've been a bad idea. The Thorian liked to enslave minds. If you'd tried to study it you would've ended up with a repeat of the same incident. Plus I still would've killed it even if capture was possible. The risks are just too great." Austin objected.

"You are probably right. At least the colony was saved." Said the Asari.

"Of course it was saved. A Helldiver goes to any lengths to help a human colony." Said the Turian.

Austin was very tempted to just disconnect the council. He would not be criticized for that.

"You'd do the same for the own colonies. Plus Helldivers protect humans from incidents exactly like this. You can hardly blame me for doing my job. Now if you'll excuse me." He said. As he said that he gave in to his frustration and ended the comm abruptly.

"Whoops. Sorry, Commander. We lost the link." Said Joker.

Austin disembarked from the Normandy before everyone else. They had now docked back at the Citadel and as Austin had promised he had told the crew and his squad that they could have shore leave. He had disembarked before everyone else because he needed to make the arrangements for his swimming date with Liara. As he neared the elevator however he found an Alliance admiral waiting for him.

"Rear Admiral Mikhailovich, Fifth fleet." Said the Admiral.

Austin saluted.

"Admiral. I wasn't told to expect you, sir. What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I command the 63rd Scout Flotilla. The Normandy was slated for my unit after its shakedown run. Then the council got their paws… claws. Tentacles. Whatever. They got them on our ship. And you." Said the Admiral.

"With all due respect, Admiral. That's hardly my fault. To be completely honest with you I never wanted to be a Spectre. They're nothing but trouble. But still the Alliance thinks they can decide what happens to me. Pathetic! As for the Normandy. It was Captain Anderson's choice to hand it over to me. If you have a problem with it, talk to him." Austin said sternly.
He wasn't intimidated by the Admiral. He also hated that the Alliance brass still felt as though they owned him. In all honesty they didn't, the Arkane Council and the Helldivers did. The Alliance however didn't seem to like that. He fully understood why General Zartrack had been angry as Anderson and the Alliance brass for lying to the Arkanes.

"Well that isn't the reason why I'm here, Commander. And as far as I know you were in the Alliance and still are. The Brass is full within their rights to have a say with you. But I don't begrudge the politicians decision to through you to the Council. It's an… opportunity.” Said Mikhailovich.

Austin snorted in his helmet. Fortunately the Admiral didn't hear him.

"An opportunity for the Alliance you mean! You're taking all the credit for this.” He thought. "When this is over I must remember to have a word with the Arkane council. Try and get them to make the Alliance leave me alone. I haven't been with the Alliance for a whole decade."

"I do begrudge this overdesigned piece of tin, though." Mikhailovich finished.

Austin nearly lost it there, but he kept his cool.

"Admiral, I didn't build this thing. I fail to see how I can be blamed for this." He said, trying his best not to yell.

"This experiment diverted billions form our appropriation bills. For the same price, we could've had a heavy cruiser. But no, we had to make nice to the Turians. Throw money at a co-developed boondoggle. I'm here to make an inspection, Commander. Normandy is an Alliance warship. I intend to see she's up to snuff." Said Mikhailovich.

"The Normandy may be an Alliance warship, but she's on loan to the Citadel. And since I'm also in command, it's therefore on loan to the Arkane Council and the Helldiver as well. That means she's not in your chain of Command." Said Austin definitely.

"I believe there's something wrong with my ears. Did you just contradict me?” Mikhailovich asked crossly.

"This ship is Council, Arkane and Helldiver property right now. So respectfully, please clear the gangway." Austin confirmed. He resisted to the urge to make the go away hand gesture.

"Have it your way, Commander. But expect me to file a report on this." Said Mikhailovich crossly.

"Good luck with that. If you're filing a report about me it goes to the Arkane Council. Not the Alliance. And I doubt they'll share your views." Austin snickered in his mind as Mikhailovich left.

Austin headed into the elevator that would lead him to the C-sec academy. From there he planned to head to the Presidium and get everything set for Liara's swim. He had told Liara where to meet him so he didn't have to worry about going back for her. As the elevator door opened however he was stopped by a reporter.

"Oh no! Not again! I hate interviews!” he thought.

"Commander Shepard. Khalisah bint Sinan Al-Jilani, Westerland News. Would you answer a few question for our veiwers?” she asked.

"Wow. That's a hell of a long name to memorize." Austin thought. He had heard that name before. He often turned away reporters who wanted an interview with him. Ever since Elysium he'd been sick of the constant media attention and had pleaded with Arkanes to sort it out. They had done so
but had told Austin that they had to make nice with the press since they didn't want people to start hearing the wrong things about the Helldivers. Sometimes Austin did make an exception for certain reporters. Miss Al-Jilani on the other hand he knew very little about. In fact all he did know was what a fellow Helldiver soldier had told him. The soldier ad said that she had become so annoying since the questions she asked always seemed to be ways of trying to make the interviewee look bad. The Helldiver had even lost it and punched Khalisah in the face. Fortunately for him and the rest of the Helldivers, the soldier had shorted out her camera, so she had no proof for her superiors or the public that it had happened. Still Austin had taken the soldier's advice about her.

"I'm not in the mood Miss Al-Jilani." He said, trying his best to sound polite.

"People back home have heard a lot of wild stories about you, Commander. I can give you the chance to set the record straight. What do you say?" Khalisah asked.

"I say, go away. I have no time for reporters and I certainly don't have time to justify myself to your viewers. I have a galaxy to save. Excuse me." Said Austin as he walked off.

"Your choice, Shepard."

Austin simply waited. All the arrangements had been made now. The pool was now his to use for as long as he wanted. All he had to do now was waiting for Liara to turn up. He was currently waiting just outside the changing rooms for her. He had to admit he was a bit nervous about this. If it had been around other people and the pool had been public he would've been fine with this since it would've been like an actual date. On the downside though, Liara wouldn't be allowed to swim naked for this date. He could not deny that this was something he was excited about.

After what felt like a whole hour, Liara finally turned up.

"Ah, there you are. I was wondering when you'd show." Said Austin.

"I'm still a bit new to the Citadel." Said Liara.

"So… Shall we?" Austin asked.

Liara nodded and the couple separated. They re-joined later in the pool area. Austin had removed his armour and suit mesh and was now in just his boxers. Liara then emerged wearing a purple robe around her.

"Well. This is it." Said Austin nervously.

"I must say, that does look very inviting." Said Liara.

The pool was fairly large. A bit of steam was emitting from the pool. Austin had been told that was because the water was very warm. In front of the pool was a massive window that showed an absolutely stunning view of the Citadel. Another view behind the pool also gave them an excellent view of the Presidium. It was high up on the upper levels though so that no one saw the pool. To the people and cars outside, it was just a simple window.

"Ladies first?" Austin asked.

"Such a gentlemen." Liara teased. She walked up to the edge of the pool and shrugged her shoulders. The purple robe slipped from her wonderful blue body, and she stood completely naked before him. Austin was left completely speechless by the sight of her. True her old, tight fitting, armour had shown most of her… assets. But seeing her here, completely nude in front of him was
something entirely different. Her breasts looked even larger than he had thought now that they weren't confined in anything and her butt looked even more round.

Liara looked over her shoulder and smiled seductively at him.

"Like what you see?" she teased.

".... Wow." Austin managed.

Liara giggled and dived into the deliciously hot water. Austin could see her bright blue naked form rippling in the water before she resurfaced.

"Oh, that feels so good." She said. She then turned to Austin. She swam right over to the edge and leant on it slightly. She then pulled herself up just enough that her large Breasts appeared into view. She then made a seductive "come here" gesture with her finger. She smiled very seductively as she did it. Austin walked over to the edge and began to remove his boxers. Before he could pull them down however, Liara grabbed them and pulled them into the pool with her, pulling Austin in with her in the process.

Liara laughed and wrapped her arms around the submerged Helldiver, pulling him up. The water was shallow enough to only come up to shoulder level, but was deep enough to swim under.

"Well you're in here now..." she said. "And I believe I said that I wanted you to swim naked with me."

"Well I was just about to take them off before you pulled me in." Austin said.

He slowly wrapped his hands around Liara's naked back and pulled her closer to him. Feeling her naked against him was unlike anything he'd ever felt.

"Why don't I do it for you?" Liara asked as she disappeared beneath the water. Austin looked down into the water and saw her reaching for his boxers. She grabbed them and slowly pulled them down, releasing his rather stiff penis. Liara then remerged with his wet boxers in her hand.

"I'd heard human males where well-endowed but I never expected you to be that large." she said.

"You're gonna make me cum if you keep talking dirty like that, Liara." Austin chuckled.

"Maybe I want you too." Liara teased as she twirled his boxers round on her finger a few times before throwing them back at the edge of the pool to join her discarded robe. She now merely rested her arms around his neck and smiled at him as they continued to float around in the pool.

"I love you so much, Austin." Said Liara.

"I love you too, Liara." Austin responded. "Truth be told, I wish we could just do this for all of eternity. No Saren, no threat to the galaxy, no Council. Just you and me and this warm, clear blue water."

Austin then pulled Liara into a very deep and long kiss. At the same time he started running his hands up and down her smooth, nude figure. She sighed softly in response. As they continued to passionately kiss, he set about massaging her beautiful back. Her skin looked even more stunning when she was wet, and he delighted in delicately massaging her all the way down to the small of her back. He then stopped there to pay some attention to her gorgeously large bottom.

Liara moaned passionately as she continued to kiss her boyfriend. As he continued playing with her
large behind, she hugged him even closer to her. Her tits now squashed against his chest and she started to feel his large cock against her stomach. Unable to help herself, she removed her left from his back and slowly moved it all the way down and grasped it.

Spurred on by this new bold move by Liara he gently pushed her up against the edge of the pool. Still he refused to break the kiss with her. He decided to pay her back for stroking him and brought his left hand to one of her breasts and started to squeeze and massage it. Liara moaned her approval as she continued to kiss him.

Finally the two lovers released each other's lips and gasped for air.

"Wow." Said Liara, clearly out of breath. "In all my life, I've never been kissed like that."

"Me neither. With the other partners I had, it was just sex. But with you. It's just so much better. It's longer, more passionate and it's with the woman I love." Said Austin.

"Technically I'm not a woman, Austin." Said Liara.

"Ah, yes. You Asari are mono-gendered. You tend not to think of male and female." Said Austin.

"Although since I do have the same sort of anatomy as a female, such as breasts and a vagina, I would probably fill what you call a female role." Said Liara.

"Well, it doesn't really matter to me. All I care about now is you." Austin responded.

"Austin. I should let you know; I've never melded with anyone before, or experienced union." Said Liara.

"Serious? A hot and beautiful Asari like you?" Austin asked in slight disbelief.

"No. Most of my life has been spent on remote digs, and I've never had any lovers. Other than you." Said Liara.

"I understand what you're trying to say. You still want some time before attempting a union with me. Or you think it's still a bit early in our relationship for that." Said Liara.

Liara nodded. Then however she began to start stroking his erection. Austin jumped slightly at this.

"Or was I wrong?" he asked.

"I only said that I wasn't ready for union, Austin. However the union is more than just sex. And I never said that I wasn't ready for what you humans tend to call "The next stage". said Liara as she continued to stroke his penis and lined it up with her pussy.

"Are you sure though, Liara? I don't want you to do this just because you think you have to." Said Austin.

"I'm very sure, Austin. When you told me about this, nude swim, I had a feeling it may grow even more intimate than that. So I've done plenty of research into human sex. I want this, Austin." Liara begged.

"Very well then, love. Hope you're ready though. I fucked the Asari Consort before I met you, and I gave her one hell of a night. Think you can handle it?" Austin asked seductively.

"Yes! I want you to make love to me. I want your lips on my body! I want to feel your tongue on my breasts! Taste them!" Liara pleaded. Austin was only too happy to obey.
Austin lapped at the Asari's sapphire nipples, teasing the hardened tips. He let his lips close over Liara's right breast, sucking fiercely on the enormous mound of soft flesh before lightly grazing it with his teeth. Liara screamed her approval and arched her back, pressing her bosom against Austin's hungry mouth even harder. Austin set his hands on either side of Liara's butt. He looked up at her.

"Ready, my love?" he asked.

Liara once again kissed him furiously and then paused for breath.

"Yes! Do it, Austin! Fuck me!" she whispered.

Grinning with boyish wonder, Austin pulled Liara down, impaling her on his bulging cock. Liara let out a beautiful cry of delight that echoed in the vast swimming pool as he pounded away, watching as her grand breasts jiggled wildly with each of his thrusts.

"God, Liara! You are stunning! Aaaaaah! Oh, and your body feels so…oh, you feel incredible!" Austin groaned.

"I can feel you filling me, Austin! Oooooh! Oh, YES!" Liara moaned lustfully as her thighs pulled Austin's shaft deeper into her. "Goddess! I never even dreamed it would be so good! Take me, my love! Take me!"

Austin picked up a faster pace, and moved both arms to hold Liara. With each thrust Liara was gasping breathlessly, the tension in her muscles slowly building to a crescendo.

"Liara, I'm gonna cum!" Austin moaned.

"Me too! Cum with me, Austin!" Liara responded.

Austin felt Liara's muscles clenching his manhood tightly, her muscles convulsing as a series of generous spurts came forth as he ejaculated deep into her. Liara adored the feeling of Austin emptying his hot seed into her. His hands were gently caressing her lower midsection. Even with his soft touch clouding her senses and the heat of the water, she could still feel the immense heat inside her, from both his large penis still fully sheathed within her, and the large amount of hot seed it had spilled within her. She smiled as she again realized their physical lovemaking had become just as important to her as the melding, something she naively believed could never happen when she first studied what would be involved in a relationship with a human male. Austin was still holding her tightly a few minutes after their joint release had died down, his member not showing the slightest signs of softening. Eventually, Liara broke the silence.

"Goddess, Austin. That was…"

"Amazing?" Austin suggested.

"Yes. I love you so much." Said Liara.

"I love you too." Said Austin.

He gave her nearest head fold a gentle nibble and kiss, and she cooed softly in response.

"Think you can go again?" Liara asked.

"For you, I could go on all day if you wanted." Austin replied.

"How long can we use this pool?" Liara asked.
“As long as we want. I told the crew they could have a whole day of shore leave, so we can do this the entire day if you want.” Austin replied.

Liara smiled at him and kissed him again. "I'd love nothing more." She said.

For the next few hours, Austin and Liara continued to make love. During those hours Austin took the opportunity to teach Liara a few other sexual positions he'd learned and also how to make the most of them.

Finally after hours of long hard fucking, they were completely spent.

"By the goddess. That was the most pleasurable experience I've ever had, Austin." Said Liara.

"I agree. I'm tempted to say that you were even better than the Consort." Said Austin as he slowly withdrew his large, still erect manhood from Liara's gorgeous blue folds.

"You sure you can't do one more round? Perhaps maybe a… shower?" Liara asked.

"What has happened to you, Liara? All of a sudden you've become sex crazed." Austin asked.

"I don't know. I think it all started when a handsome young man came along and fucked my brains out." Said Liara.

"Alright then. Shower it is." Said Austin.

He let go of Liara and allowed her to climb the ladder out of the pool. Liara however felt very naughty and stopped halfway up the climbing, leaving her beautiful bottom hanging irresistibly in the air, glistening from the water. She laughed when, as she fully expected, she felt Shepard planting kisses on her dainty behind.

They both made their way into the men's showers. There was no one else here and they still had the whole thing to themselves. They spent the next ten minutes or so, washing and soaping each other, stopping occasionally for a few minutes to exchange intimate kisses and hugs.

Then Liara did something very surprising. She slowly dropped down onto her knees and grasped Austin's still large, hard cock.

Austin raised an eyebrow. "Really? Here?" He laughed.

"Are you complaining?" She looked up at him.

"I...I'm not complaining, I'm just surprised." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Bearing in mind that I did research into human and Asari sex." Liara smiled as she slowly began worked her hand up and down his length, before she smiled sweetly and took him into her beautiful mouth.

"Damn. That is good, Liara. I don't know how you learned this, but you are the best." He moaned as she sucked and licked his cock. Liara laughed inside of her head as she slowly pushed the tip of him into her throat. She gagged and quickly pulled out. Shepard tried to stop her but she was having none of it. She pushed his muscle into the back of her throat, suppressing the gag reflex.

"Oh, God! I'm about to burst, Liara!" Austin indicated that he was beyond the point of no return.

His toes curled up and his breathing became ragged. His cock jerked in her throat, as he came, the top half of his body jerked forward in time with the spasms, sending his cum straight down her
throat. He felt her swallow as she continued to move her tongue around, causing him to become oversensitive, but milking him for every last drop.

She released his rapidly softening member from her mouth, smiling up at him as she swallowed the last remnant of his seed.

"Wow...Best thing I've felt in three weeks." He laughed.

Liara stood back up.

"Thank you for such a lovely day, Austin. I love you." She said.

"It was my pleasure, Liara. And I love you." Austin replied back.

As the shower water continued to cascade down on them they sealed their lips with a long, passionate kiss.

And there you have it. I think I'm getting better at writing these sex chapters. Also I hope that I managed to make this one more romantic than last time. I'd like to also point out that the Union between Shepard and Liara won't happen until the night before Ilos.

Hope you enjoyed this chapter as much as I enjoyed writing it. See you soon.

Would also like to say that next chapter will be another few Citadel assignment and may (no promise) may be the start of the Bring Down the Sky DLC. I definitely plan on including that in the story. I think it will be quite interesting for me to do since the Helldivers are in a proxy war with the Batarians.
Chapter 12, Another Assignment

This one will just be two more Citadel assignments. However I'm pleased to say that the ending of this chapter will set the scene for Bring Down the Sky, which will feature in the next chapter.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this.

Chapter 12

Another Assignment

The elevator the Citadel tower stopped and then opened. Austin stepped out. After having spent the whole of yesterday making love to Liara in the large swimming pool he was now looking for Emily Wong. After enjoying their shore leave yesterday, the crew of the Normandy had returned to their posts. Austin had however instructed some of them, to go shopping for supplies and new weapons. Austin meanwhile had received a message from Emily Wong requesting his services once again. Seeing as how the two had made a little deal with one another, Austin had replied saying that he would take the job.

Eventually, he found Emily waiting for him near the stairs.

"Hello again, Commander! I've got a proposition for you." She greeted. "Since you helped me get information on the crime syndicate, I've gotten a lot more backing from my publishers. I'm investigating traffic controller conditions now, and I wondered if you could help."

"What do you need me to do?" Austin asked.

"I've heard rumours that the space traffic controllers are overworked to a dangerous degree. I can't get into the control room, but you could. If you planted a bug inside, I could crack the story." Said Emily.

Austin took a tiny little device from one of pouches on his combat belt and showed it to Emily.

"What's that?" she asked.

"This is a special, Helldiver bug. It's the very best I have." Austin answered. "Watch."

He activated his omni tool and the small device slowly folded open and transformed into a small mechanical spider. Emily stood back amazed by what she had just seen.

"Wow." She said.

"Sync your omni tool to it and it'll transmit the information to you." Said Austin as he held the little spider out to Emily. She took it into her right hand and used her omni tool to scan the bug. She then handed it back to Austin. The little mechanical spider then folded back up into its small device form.

"Once I have the bug attached I'll report back to you and let you know." Said Austin as he placed the bug back in his belt.

"Excellent. Just place it on a terminal with a good view of the area. Thank you again for your help. In the long run, this story is going to save lives." Said Emily.
As Austin turned to see an Alliance Admiral. He appeared to be talking to a message, and he looked concerned. Austin decided to see what the matter was.

"Congratulations on becoming the first human Spectre, Commander. I'm certain you'll be up to the challenge." He said.

"I appreciate that, sir." Said Austin as he saluted.

"My name is Admiral Kahoku. It's about time the Alliance got one of our own in with the Spectres. We need people like you to deal with our… problems." Said the Admiral.

"Is something wrong, Admiral?" Austin asked.

"I'm getting stonewalled by bureaucratic assholes. Nothing new. Maybe you can help me, Shepard. One of my recon teams was investigating some strange activity out in the Traverse. We lost contact yesterday. Now I can't get clearance to check it out – suddenly it's a restricted area. But that doesn't apply to you, Shepard. Helldivers have small operation in the Traverse and Spectres can go anywhere they want. You can find out why my teams dropped out of contact." Said Kahoku.

"I'll find them, Admiral." Said Austin.

"I appreciate that, Commander. I was running out of options. I'm going to stay here and see if I can find anything out through official channels. Won't hold my breath though." Said Kahoku. "I'll upload the info on where my team was last seen to your ship. Maybe you can get some answers."

As Austin exited the elevator, he was once again in the C-sec academy. Remembering what Emily had said to him, he slowly made his way to where the traffic controller was located. As he neared the stairs he could see that there were too many C-sec agents for him to plant the bug himself. He slowly found his way over to a corner and took out the bug without anyone noticing. From behind his back, he activated his omni tool. The small device once again unfolded itself into its robot spider form.

Using the interface inside his helmet he was able to control the spider drone directly. Despite all the various C-sec agents in the rooms and hallways, they failed to notice the tiny metallic spider crawling on the ceiling.

The Standard issue ETX 18 Helldiver Spider drone was one of the first gadgets to be invented for the Helldivers. They were normally used for stealth missions or for the exact same reason he was using this one, planting bugs and cameras. When the spiders had first been designed, they had originally been designed as small flying drones with rotor blades. These however where very hard to operate and needed to have large enough rotor blades for adequate lift, and this made it easier for the enemy to spot them. As the years went by however the Arkanes slowly perfected the designs until finally the flying concept was abandoned all together and replaced with the Spiders that where now used today.

After climbing on the ceiling for several minutes, the spider that Austin had deployed finally made it into the traffic controller. After finding an inconspicuous place that not only provided a good view of the whole room but was also where no one would notice it, Austin issued a command to the spider through his omni tool. Very quietly, the mechanical spider drone attached itself to the indicated position and folded back up into its small device form.

With the bug deployed, Austin decided to head back to the Citadel tower the long way by going through the Wards. To his surprise, he ran into Conrad Verner again.
"There are rumours on the extranet that you've been made the first human Spectre! That's incredible!" he said excitedly.

"Right. Conrad. We talked awhile back." Austin replied. He hated to admit it, but all the attention that he was now getting as a Spectre was starting to get him.

"You remember me? Wow. Hey, I know you're in rush, but… can I get your picture?" Conrad asked.

"I don't have problem with it, but… why?" Austin asked.

"You're a hero, Shepard. Decades from now, humanity is going to remember you. And I'll have a picture." Conrad replied.

"Okay. How do you want me?" Austin asked as he struck a pose.

"Just hold up your gun. Actually, can you hold your sword in the other hand?" said Conrad.

Austin did as Conrad instructed and held up his SMG. He then unsheathed his sword and held it up as well. He was thankful that he didn't have any of his team with him and that the Wards weren't too busy today. He felt a complete fool doing this.

"Perfect!" said Conrad. There was a brief flash as Conrad took the picture. Austin then returned to normal and sheathed his sword and gun.

"Thanks again, Commander! I'm going to hang this in my living room! My wife will love it!" said Conrad as he left.

"I hope, that's last time." Austin thought.

Finally, Austin made it back to the Citadel tower. Emily was waiting for him.

"I'm already getting readings. This is going to make a great story! Thank you so much for your help! Here, this is everything I've got from my publisher's budget." She said as she handed Austin a sum of credits.

"It was no problem, Emily. Good luck with your story. It deserves to be heard." Said Austin as he shook hands with her.

"I appreciate your support. I hope this will save some lives in the long run. Thank you again for your help. I'm going to go show this to my publisher! Oh, and if you ever fancy an interview, you know who to call." She said as she walked off.

"Message coming in. Patching it through." Came Joker's voice.

Austin had now returned to the Normandy and had ordered Joker to plot a course for the coordinates that Kahoku had given him.

"Commander, we've just found out about what happened between you and Miss Al-Jilani. I don't blame you for refusing an interview, but the brass is a bit disappointed that you declined. They were hoping to know the opinions of humanity's first human Spectre." Came Admiral Hackett's voice.

"With all due respect, Admiral. I'm a soldier. Not a public speaker. I would've just messed it up, or worse, lost my temper with her." Said Austin.
"Don't worry, Commander. I'm not blaming you, I agree with your choice. She shouldn't have ambushed you like that. Just wanted to let you know what the response was back home." Said Hackett. "I won't keep you any longer. Fifth fleet out."

With the message ended, Austin plotted a course for the coordinates that Kahoku had given him. With the trip due to take a few hours he decided to kill the time by talking with some of his crew.

"Shepard! I'm glad you're here!" said Tali excitedly.

"Good to see you smiling again. So to speak." Said Austin.

"I'm sleeping much better now. I guess I'm getting used to how quiet your ship is. I still think a lot about my pilgrimage though. With all the worlds we go to, I'm hoping that I'll find something that I can bring back to the Flotilla." Said Tali.

"I'm sure you'll find something. We're still far from of this story." Said Austin.

"I know. I wonder sometimes, Shepard. Have there been any Quarians in the Helldivers that never completed their Pilgrimages? I've heard a lot of rumours that Quarians that never returned from them always joined them." Tali asked.

"Hard for me to say, Tali. I asked, Leena the very same question once. She never answered. Eventually though, I found out why. She had a lover before she went on her pilgrimage. During their pilgrimages they both stayed in contact. Eventually though, her lover said something that really hurt her. He said that life on the Flotilla was boring and useless compared to the Flotilla. He joined the Helldivers and never returned from pilgrimage. Despite this however, she refused to let him go. After she completed her Pilgrimage she then left and joined the Helldivers too. By the time she tracked him down though, he… he was killed in action."

"So, there are some?" Tali questioned.

"Well… some I suppose. But not all. There have even been some that I know who said that they joined the Helldivers for the Migrant Fleet. So not all. You're people don't join our ranks to abandon their people."

"Thank you for telling me this, Shepard. I'd heard Leena had special reasons for joining the Helldivers. But I had no idea her story was like that." Said Tali.

"Anytime, Tali." Said Austin.

"I should get back to work on the engines. But thanks for coming by. It's nice to feel welcome here." Said Tali.

The coordinates provided by Admiral Kahoku ultimately led to the planet Edolus in the Sparta system of the Artemis Tau cluster. The weather conditions were windy but where still calm enough for the drop ship to be used. Besides, the Mako was still being repaired from the damage it sustained from the Terror Geth.

Austin ultimately decided to take Garrus and Wrex for this mission. Despite the very bumpy ride, it wasn't too bad.

"This is as close as I can get you, gentlemen. The wind's too strong for me to get any closer. You'll have to go on foot." Came the pilot's voice.
"Okay, set her down." Said Austin.

As the drop ship touched down, the doors opened. Austin now slightly regretted that they didn't have the Mako. With wind this strong it would take them a while to get to the site on foot. Upon feeling how strong the wind was, Garrus and Wrex fastened their own helmet's on. Even for them, wind like this was way too strong.

After what felt like several hours of wondering aimlessly in the storm they reached what looked like a massive drop.

"That can't be right." Said Austin as he looked again at the holo map on his omni tool.

"Perhaps the storm's messing with the instruments slightly." Garrus suggested.

Austin considered that and ran a diagnostic on his suit. Nothing was picked up.

"No. Everything's working fine. The marines are down there somewhere." He said.

"Then I guess we're going down there?" Wrex asked.

"Yep." Austin confirmed.

"How though? You'd probably survive that but I'm not so sure about the rest of us." Said Garrus.

Austin detached two small circular objects from the back of his belt and handed one to both of them.

"What are these?" Garrus asked.

"Grappling devices. Helldivers use them for climbing up and down surfaces." Austin answered.

"Is there anything that suit of yours doesn't have?" Wrex asked.

"Well, it doesn't fly." Austin answered.

"Seriously? All that advanced technology, and the Arkanes can't enable flight?" Garrus asked.

"They can make flight boosters that are small enough, but they never provide of power. Of course larger ones would suffice but then that adds too much weight and slows us down. Plus if you're carrying a massive rocket booster on back, the enemy spots you instantly." Said Austin as he attached the grappling device to his rifle. He then aimed at the edge of the cliff and fired. A small claw shot out of the device and embedded itself in the rock. Austin pulled tightly on it a couple of times to make sure it would stay there. He then removed the grappling device from his gun and fastened it back onto his belt.

Having seen how to use the grapples from Austin, Garrus and Wrex got the message and did the same. Wrex managed to get his claw embedded first try as well. For Garrus however it took three attempts for the claw to stay embedded.

The climb down wasn't easy. They had to take it slow and couldn't jump either because of the wind. The risk of being blown to the side and being entangled with another's cable was too great. As they neared the bottom however, the wind seemed to die down. Once they touched down Garrus seemed to struggle to figure out how he detached the cable.

"No don't….." Austin tried to say. But before he could finish, Garrus detached the device from his belt. It zoomed right back up to the top, similar to how a tape measure retracted. Austin face palmed.
"Garrus! You were supposed to push the red button on the side!" he said annoyingly. He then demonstrated by pressing the red button on the device. The claw detached itself from the cliff face and retracted back into the device. Wrex did the same.

"Sorry, Shepard. I..." Garrus attempted to say. But Austin stopped him.

"Don't worry, Garrus." He said reassuringly. "I'm not angry at you. You just need to exercise some more patience."

"Thanks, Shepard." Garrus replied. He then looked back up at the cliff face. "But how am I gonna get back up?"

"One of us will just have to give you a piggy back ride." Austin answered.

"Don't even think about it, Vakarian!" said Wrex.

Both Austin and Garrus chuckled slightly.

With the storm being much thinner down in the large crater, the team found it much easier to see, and pretty soon they could see in the distance what looked like a camp of some kind. As they got closer however, they could see it wasn't a camp. There were several dead bodies and what looked like a damaged signal beacon that hadn't been activated yet.

"Spread out. Check for any survivors. I'm gonna look at that beacon." Austin ordered.

Garrus and Wrex separated from Austin and began to check the bodies. Austin meanwhile went up to the beacon and accessed it with his omni tool. He found a message in it.

"My name is Jack Scarter. If you are hearing this message, then you must heed my warning. This place... (cough) this place is a trap." It said. The message looked in poor shape. It was corrupted at certain parts and as a result certain bits of the message where nothing but static. "If you can hear this, get off this planet now. It belongs to (static) it will....."

The message cut out right after that. Austin began to worry.

"Find anything?" he asked.

"Nothing. They're all dead." Said Garrus.

"Come and have a look at this." Austin indicated to the two. He played the message again to both of them.

"Why do I get the feeling we're not alone here?" Wrex asked.

"I'll see if I clear this message up a bit." Said Austin as he started typing away at his omni tool. After about a minute, he replayed the signal "If you can hear this, get off this planet now. It belongs to (cough) it belongs... to a Thresher Maw!"

Austin and his companions froze with shock. Now it all made sense. They had stumbled into the nest of a Thresher Maw. Austin immediately activated his wrist communicator.

"Hellhound, do you copy?" he said.

The signal was crackly, but he could still pick it up.

"We need immediate evac." He said.
"Copy that, Commander. The storm's died down a bit now. I may be able to close enough." Came the pilot's voice.

"Roger that. We'll see if we can get out of here before the Thresher Maw finds out we're here." Said Austin. He deactivated his comm link and then turned to his comrades.

"Don't make any sudden movements. I've dealt with a Thresher Maw before. They sense their prey from the vibrations on the ground. If we move slowly and gently, it won't detect us." He said.

For a long time they continued to move slowly back towards the cliff face. Just as they were near the end however, Wrex failed to notice the small crack in the ground. His foot got caught in it and he was unable to stop himself tumbling to the ground with a loud bang.

Almost immediately, the whole ground began to shake and rumble. Then, out of the ground, burst a real, living, breathing, Thresher Maw. Immediately, it spotted its prey. It reared up its head, took a long intake and then spat a huge dollop of Acid right at them.

Everyone immediately reacted and dove for cover behind several large, nearby rocks. The Acid barely missed them. From behind cover, Wrex and Garrus fired at the Maw. Austin meanwhile tried to charge up his nuke launcher. He didn't need to worry about the Maw moving. Thresher Maws weren't that bright. They mostly just stayed in the same place when they burst out of the ground.

After a short wait his nuke launcher was fully charged. He aimed it at the Thresher Maw and fired. The shot swiftly went right at the Maw. To his surprise it then swallowed the Nuke. For moment it looked as though the nuke had no effect. But that was right before the nuke erupted. The Thresher Maw's face exploded and the headless, writhing body slowly sunk back into the ground.

"Nice shot, Shepard." Said Wrex.

"That's two Thresher Maw's I've killed now." Said Austin.

"Admiral Kahoku will need to know about this." Said Garrus.

"Agreed. Let's get off this rock." Said Austin. He reactivated his wrist comm. "Hellhound, what's your E.T.A?"

"I can see you now, Commander. Setting down now." Came the Pilot's voice.

In the distance the drop ship slowly descended from the sky. It was a welcome sight.

"A Thresher Maw? You're serious?" Ashley asked in disbelief.

Austin, Garrus and Wrex disembarked from the drop ship. They were all a bit shook up.

"Yeah. Wiped out Kahoku's team and then it... Agh!" Austin suddenly winced in pain. He looked down at his side. Some of the Thresher Maw's acid had burnt his armour and one of the Thresher Maw's talons had somehow flown in from the explosion.

"Oh God! He's hurt! Get him to Dr. Chakwas!" Kaiden ordered.

The two marines helped the struggling Helldiver into the med bay. Both Dr. Chakwas and Liara were waiting.

"What happened?!" asked Liara.
"Some of the acid must've.... Ouch! Kaiden, will you please be careful how you hold me!" Austin shouted in pain.

"Shepard! You need to get out of that armour!" Chakwas said urgently.

"Retract." Austin winced.

His armour instantly opened up and he stepped out. Kaiden and Ashley helped onto the med table. Liara then helped him to remove the upper part of his suit mesh.

"I need you two out." Chakwas said to Kaiden and Ashley.

The two marines obeyed and went out of the med bay. Liara though stayed.

"It's gonna be okay, Austin." Said Liara reassuringly.

"I know, Liara. Don't worry, I'm fine. It just stings like hell." Austin winced, still trying to smile. "At least now I know why my shields weren't responding. What I don't get is why my shields went off... Ow! Karin please warn me next time you do that!"

Dr. Chakwas pressed a clean, wet flannel to Austin's side which had been burned rather badly by the acid. Fortunately his shields and armour had taken the worst bits of the acid.

"How come you're suit didn't detect a breach?" Chakwas asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps the acid fried a circuit. Whatever it was, I'll fix it later." Austin replied, still in a bit of pain.

"Liara, keep that pressed to his side. I need to get a syringe." Chakwas told Liara.

Liara did as she was told and used her free hand to hold the flannel to Austin's side. Liara was starting to notice all the other scars that his body had. One or two gunshot wounds, several scars and bruises and even a few other acid burns. Eventually though she became more distracted by his muscular chest. Austin noticed her eyeing him.

"See something you like?" he teased.

Liara blushed.

"Hadn't noticed how handsomely fit you where last time I saw you without your shirt." She said.

"Good to see I'm still in top shape." He smiled at her. He then kissed her on the cheek.

"If you two are quite done flirting." Said Chakwas. She had a small syringe in her hand. "And don't try to deny it. I've kind of known for a while about you two."

"Just don't go spreading it around, Karin." Said Austin.

"This may sting a bit." Said Chakwas as she inserted the needle into part of Austin's acid wound. He winced slightly but not very much.

"There. That should at least help the skin grow back a bit faster over some of the exposed flesh. You are going to have another scar though." She said.

"One more to end to the collection." Austin shrugged.
"Get plenty of rest Shepard." Said Chakwas.

Austin nodded. He then turned to Liara.

"Can you help me to my quarters? I'm not doing well on my feet." Austin asked.

Liara nodded and helped Austin out of the med bay and into the Captain's quarters. She then helped him into his bead.

"Thanks, Love." He said.

Liara smiled at him and leaned in to kiss him. As she did he suddenly pulled her onto the bed with him. For a long while the two merely lay there, locked in a passionate kiss. After they eventually broke apart for air, Austin spoke.

"You know. I'd sleep much better with you beside me. Will you… stay the night with me? Obviously with this injury I won't be able to give you sort of night I had in mind. But…” he asked. But Liara stopped him.

"Yes. I will."

An hour later Liara had changed into her night clothes, which to Austin's surprise wasn't actualy night clothes at all. Turned out a fair few Asari slept in the nude. He couldn't help but whistle at her.

"Sexaaaaayyy!" he said. Liara smiled back at him and climbed into bed. She rested up against Austin rested her head on his chest.

"Sleep well, my love." She said.

"You too, Liara." Said Austin.

With that, they both drifted off into a peaceful sleep.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you this sir. But I'm afraid you're unit's all dead. They were killed by a Thresher Maw." Said Austin.

Austin had now returned to the Citadel to give Admiral Kahoku the news of his team's death. He had now repaired his armour from the Thresher Maw's acid. It turned out that the acid caused several of the electrics to short circuit and thus it hadn't detected the damage. Austin had sent a message to the Arkanes about this small incident. He had recommended that it be taken into account for Helldiver armour updates.

Austin was still having to wear the bandage. But the injuries had already begun to heal. With any luck he'd be back to normal in no time.

"A Thresher Maw? That's not… My men wouldn't just stumble into a Thresher nest. Not the entire unit!" said Kahoku.

"I managed to extract more information from that beacon. It had lured them there in first place with an Alliance distress signal. It was perfectly placed so that they'd land right beside the nest." Said Austin.

"Damn it! I had a bad feeling about this ever since my team disappeared. An Alliance beacon used as bait, my unit wiped out, and nobody seems to know anything about it. Commander, I appreciate what you did. Now I need to do my part. The family of those marines deserve to know why they
died." Said Kahoku.

"I wish you luck, Admiral." Said Austin.

"I'll let you know if I find anything interesting." Said Kahoku as he walked off.

"Commander, I've got urgent priority one message for you." Came Joker's voice.

"Is it the ambassador? Because if it is, he better have a good reason." Said Austin.

"Actually, it's not. You're gonna love this. It's from the Arkane Council." Joker replied.

Austin instantly lit up at the mention of the Arkanes.

"Patch them through in the comm room." Austin ordered.

He immediately moved into the comm room. Right in front of him stood the holograms of the Arkane Council. It was nice to see them again.

"Commander, Shepard. Good to finally hear from you at last." Said the lead councillor.

"You also, Councillors." Said Austin.

"First of all congratulations on becoming the first human Spectre, Commander. Though we are still not happy at the Alliance for not telling us." Said one of the councillors.

"But that is not the reason why we have contacted you. We have an urgent matter that only you can deal with." Said another.

"What do you need, councillors?" Austin asked.

"We recently caught word that a Batarian extremist group has hijacked a mobile asteroid station in the Asgard system, setting it on a collision course with the nearby colony world of Terra Nova. We need you to stop them." The lead councillor replied.

"Why just me? I'm only one Helldiver. Shouldn't you send a squad?" Austin asked.

"We have. But the nearest forces that we can spare right now are currently half way across the galaxy. By the time they arrive it'll be too late. You on the other hand, are closer. You can get there first and stop the Batarians." One of the council answered.

"I'll plot a course immediately." Said Austin.

"Good luck, Commander. Terra Nova is a colony we can't afford to lose." Said the lead councillor.

The holograms disappeared and Austin went back into the CIC.

"Joker. Get us to Terra Nova, A.S.A.P!" he ordered. "Time for me to go back to work."

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Easter holidays will end soon. So fair warning that chapters may not be appear as quickly as they used too.

Anyway, i'm looking forward to making the changes to Bring Down the Sky. Expect lots of different dialogue.
See you next time.
Chapter 13

The Battle over Terra Nova

As soon as the Normandy cleared the Mass Relay the asteroid was already in sight.

"Status: Sensors reveal three fusion torches propelling Asteroid X57. At its current rate of acceleration, the asteroid will collide with Terra Nova in approximately 4 hours." Said the Normandy's VI.

"No time to lose then." Said Austin as he hurried down to the cargo bay. Liara and Tali were waiting for him.

"Into the Mako. Better not to use the Drop ship for this mission. Don't want the Batarians knowing it's the Helldivers until later." He said.

They climbed into the Mako and secured themselves in place, waiting for the drop.

"Analysis: Torches must be disabled to cease the acceleration." Said the VI.

Then they suddenly intercepted a distress call.

"Hello? Hello? I heard your transmission. Can you hear me?" it said. "They haven't found me yet, but I can't talk long."

The cargo bay doors opened and Austin put his foot down on the accelerator. The Mako drove forward and dropped onto the surface of the asteroid.

"Please. Shut down the fusion torches or we're all going to die. God, I hope you're hearing this." Said the distress call.

From inside the Mako Austin could see the fusion torches. As they got nearer to the first one however, several auto turrets appeared and fired on the Mako. The turrets though where easy to dispatch. Once that had been dealt with, the team disembarked and headed into the building.

Even in first room there where many dead bodies. Austin took out his assault rifle and Liara and Tali did the same. As Austin had expected, as soon as they opened the door they were greeted by three Batarian soldiers. To make matters worse, they had Varren with them.

The Batarians where surprised at first when they saw Austin. Helldivers where the one things that Batarians feared. One of them immediately ordered the Varren to attack.

Austin managed to gun down one of the Varren but the over pounced at him but Austin quickly reacted. He instantly drew out his sword and sliced the Varren in half. Some of its blood splattered onto his armour.
The Batarian soldiers opened fire on the team and they instantly dove for cover. Austin had to admit that it felt nice to fighting Batarians again. They now didn't seem so much of a push over compared to what he had been dealing with over the past few days.

Two of the Batarians where caught in Liara's singularity which she had managed to prefect since last time. Tali meanwhile, was able to disable their shields, giving Austin the opportunity he needed to fire on them. There were only a few soldiers in the room, so the battle was over quickly. A quick trip up the stairs brought the team to the torch control. At first, Austin was nervous that the decryption would be heavy. He quickly saw however that it was easy. Even today, Batarians still seemed to use rather old and out of date technology. Once the torch had been deactivated, the voice from the distress call they had heard earlier came over the radio.

"I'm reading that the first torch is shut down. Was that you? Can you hear me?" it asked.

Austin went over to the console and accessed the comm.

"Who are you? What's going on here?" he asked.

"My name's Kate Bowman. I'm an engineer. I was part of the team assigned to bring the asteroid to Terra Nova." The voice replied. "We were attacked yesterday by Batarian extremists. I've been hiding since they arrived. I think they know the torch went out."

"Any idea why they're here?" Austin asked.

"I don't know. But if this asteroid isn't slowed, millions of people on Terra Nova are going to die." Kate replied. "If I find anything I'll— I've gotta go good luck."

The signal ended. Austin turned back to his team mates.

"Let's move. We've still got two left." He said.

As they made their way downstairs and to the exit however, Austin's suit suddenly detected a life form in the next room. When they opened they saw a man with a gun standing in front of the door. As soon as he saw Austin, he fired at him. Fortunately, Austin's shields absorbed the shot.

"Oh god. I'm so sorry! I didn't realise you were a Helldiver. Are you hurt?" the man asked.

"Don't worry. It takes way more than one shot to put a helldiver down." Said Austin.

"Guess I'm not much of a soldier." Said the man. "I should've checked before I fired."

"It's alright. I know you're scared, but I'm here to help. I'm Commander Shepard." Said Austin.

"Simon. Simon Atwell. I'm the chief engineer on this rock." The man introduced. "Listen – we don't have much time. The Batarians fired up the fusion torches. You've got to shut them down before we hit Terra Nova! There are four million people down there, Shepard. Including my family."

"Tell me something I don't know." Said Austin.

"One of the torches is surrounded by live blasting caps. We were set up to excavate when we arrived at Terra Nova. I rigged them with proximity detectors. That tank of yours will set them off, so you'll have to go in on foot. Even then, they'll explode if you get too close. Just go slow and easy and you should be fine." Said Simon.

"Can't you just shut them off?" Austin asked.
"Not from here, no. One last thing, Commander. I had a crew working off-site when the attack hit. I'm worried about them." Said Simon.

"The torches are our main priority. But I will look them." Said Austin.

As they approached the next torch, Austin could see the proximity mines. He and the team got out of the Mako and proceeded on foot. The only thing that slowed them down slightly, where more Batarians, but they were easily dealt with. Inside the building there where even more, once again though they were simply gunned down like the rest. Austin quickly managed to disable the second torch.

"Are you there? You've got to hurry. You've really pissed them off." Came Kate's voice again. "Their leader's setting charges everywhere. I think he's going to blow this whole facility."

Suddenly another voice came over the radio. And it wasn't a human one.

"Get away from there!"

"Don't shoot. Please!" Kate pleaded before the signal cut out.

As they entered the second building there was once again more Batarians. This time though there were more, and they were better armed. Fortunately though, it was nothing that they couldn't handle. The last torch was offline in no time. As they made their way back down however they found more Batarians in their path.

"Hold it right there! This doesn't have to end in bloodshed!" said one of them.

Slowly, Austin and his team approached them.

"Don't come any closer, Helldiver." Said the leader. "We can do this the hard way, or we can end this peacefully."

"Odd. I didn't think you animals knew the meaning of the word." Said Austin, still keeping his gun out just in case.

"Look, I'm just doing my job here. Hijacking this rock wasn't my idea. I signed on to make a little profit. A quick grab. Nothing more."

"You expect me to believe you? When millions of people are going to die you expect me to believe that this was just for the money? What a pathetic excuse!" said Austin angrily.

"Don't you think I know that? Said the leader. "I'm just following orders here. If it where up to me; we'd have left by now."

"Well then. Just this once, it is up to you. You can still walk away now." Said Austin.

"I don't think so, Helldiver. Balak would skin me alive and sell my hide." Said the leader.

"Balak? I should've known he'd been behind this." Said Austin. "I'm done talking."

Austin pointed his gun at the Batarian leader.

"Damn it!" Austin shot the leader, the rest quickly followed.

"You know this… Balak, Shepard?" asked Tali.
"He and I have run into each other twice. Plus he's a very old enemy of the Helldivers." Said Austin. Austin looted the dead batarian leader and found a pass key.

"Balak's hold up in the main facility. Time to pay him a visit." He said.

The main facility was heavily defended, so much in fact the Mako sustained quite a bit of damage and the Team where forced to abandon it and take cover on foot. At the last minute however, a massive shot appeared from the sky and the remaining turrets where destroyed. Austin looked up and saw a very welcome sight. In orbit above Terra Nova and the asteroid was a small Helldiver fleet. The team watched as several Hellhound drop ships and Gunships descended from the Carriers. As they touched down, some of the seemed to be carrying their own rovers, and even what looked like turrets. As they were deployed however they seemed to sprout legs and walk. They looked like crabs with guns.

As the lead Gunship touched down, a ramp opened and several helldiver soldiers disembarked. They noticed Austin and saluted.

"About time you got here boys." Said Austin happily. "Who's your C.O?"

As he asked this, a familiar Helldiver disembarked from the Gunship. Austin saluted at the sight of his mentor.

"Shepard! Good to see you again!" said General Zartrack.

"General." Austin greeted. The two Helldivers shook hands. "It's Balak, sir. He's back."

"Balak? I knew it! We haven't seen or heard from him since Elysium." Said Zartrack.

"He's held up in the main facility and he has hostages." Said Austin.

"Then we do this the old fashioned way!" said Zartrack.

Even inside there seemed to be a whole army of Batarians. It took twice as long to deal with them. Once they did, Austin heard a familiar voice. He turned round and saw his old Batarians nemesis, Balak. He wore read plated Batarian armour to indicate his leadership. He also had a large scar across his face, which Austin had given many years back on Elysium. He was also missing an eye. Once again that was another injury that had been because of Austin.

"A Helldiver! I should've known. Who else would've…" Balak however stopped when Austin turned around. "You!"

"Hello, Balak. Long-time no see. How's the eye?" Austin asked.

Balak winced slightly, remembering the pain of when the Helldiver had stabbed out his eye with the same sword he carried today.

"You'll pay for that, Shepard. Still, I left my own mark on you. How's your face?"

Austin remembered the long scar on his neck. Balak had scared him first with a combat knife. This was what had caused Austin to retaliate by cutting out Balak's eye.

"Good actually. Still, at least now we can pick up where we left off, and this time I'll do more than cut out an eye.
"I don't think so, Shepard! You've interfered with my plans for the last time. No more will you and your pathetic Helldivers continue to slaughter my people. I'm leaving this asteroid. If you try to stop me, I'll detonate these charges and your helper and her friends are all going to die." Said Balak.

"Over my dead body, Balak! I'm not letting you get away this time! No after everything you've done!" said Austin.

"What I've done? This is nothing compared to what you do to my people!" Balak shouted.

"What do you expect when you try to enslave another race?" Austin asked.

"Because of humans like you, we've been forced into exile. Forced to survive on what we can scrounge up. It's been like that for decades." Said Balak.

"Don't waste my time making excuses! Your kind brought it on themselves when they left the council and tried to enslave a race that belonged to one of the largest military groups in the galaxy! What did you expect?" said Austin.

"We didn't pull away, we were forced out. When we asked the council for aid, they ignored us. As for the slavery, we're just returning the favour to humanity in the best way we can. Just too bad that those insects that you serve disagreed. That's why I attacked you at Elysium, why I'm doing this now. You forced my hand." Said Balak.

"You attacked us first. You even managed to anger the Arkanes in the process. You've got no one to blame but yourselves. Besides, how does killing innocents make up for this?"

"I could ask you the same thing, Shepard. How many Batarians did the Helldivers slaughter on Torfan?" Balak retaliated.

"Our way of returning the favour for your slavery!" Austin answered.

"Enough! It's obvious that you don't want to understand. I'm done wasting my breath with you Shepard. Now if you want your friends to live, I suggest you step aside." Said Balak.

"I don't think so!" came a voice behind Balak.

Balak whirled around to see a whole army of Helldivers uncloak right in front of him, all with their guns pointed at him.

"Balak. You are hereby placed in our custody for crimes committed against the Helldivers, the Arkanes and the human Systems Alliance." Said Zartrack.

"I have the controls to those bombs. Release me! Or I detonate those bombs and the hostages die!" Balak ordered as he activated his omni tool.

A female Helldiver however suddenly uncloaked beside Zartrack.

"Actually, they won't. With all the times we've clashed with your species, we would've thought you'd learned by now: we recue hostages over capturing you."

Balak tried to activate the bombs, but nothing happened. He snarled at Austin who also pointed his gun at Balak. He then somehow smiled.

"Well, actually, I do learn!" he said.

Balak pressed his omni tool and suddenly the whole parts of the stairway seemed to explode. Balak
had booby trapped them. The whole blast knocked every Helldiver off of their feet as where Liara and Tali. Austin however wasn't and was merely temporarily blinded by the blast. Once he could see again, he saw Balak running for the exit.

"Oh no you don't!" he yelled.

Austin unsheathed his combat knife and threw it at Balak. The knife caught the Batarian in the left shoulder. Balak groaned in pain as the knife stabbed through his shoulder armour. As he collapsed his head collided with the door control. It malfunctioned and the only exit out was locked.

Balak slowly stood back up and pulled the knife from his shoulder. He snarled at Austin.

"You've got nowhere to run, Balak. That's the only way out and I doubt you can override the lock as fast as I can knock you out." Said Austin.

"You're right. I can't." said Balak. He held out his right wrist and activated his omni tool.

"We're not gonna do this again are we?" Austin asked annoyingly.

"I believe you humans have an old saying for your swords: An elegant weapon, from a more civilised time." Said Balak as his own Batarian version of an Omni Blade flipped out of his omni tool.

"I warn you now, Balak! If you challenge me to a duel you'll end up losing another eye." Austin tried to persuade.

"If this is to be last battle, I'll take you with me!" said Balak as he went into a fencing stance. "To the death. Let's see if your senses are as sharp as your sword."

"If you insist." Austin also went into a fencing stance and slowly unsheathed his sword. He left hsi shield on his back though. This was a duel, so he wouldn't be needing it.

Balak lunged at Austin and their swords clashed. Back and forth they clashed against one another. Balak had lighter armour than Austin and therefore had better speed. Austin however was more skilled in fencing and had more experience than Balak did. Also Balak had to attack with his wrist due to the omni blade, so his parries and attacks weren't as coordinated or flexible as they could've been. For a moment the two combatants backed off, each searching for the slightest hint of weakness in their opponent's guard. This time Austin was the first to strike, sending a quick jab at the Batarian's throat. Balak raised his omni blade for an easy counter but at the last second, the Helldiver twisted his wrist downwards, intending to deliver a crippling slash across her opponent's leg. The next few minutes passed without incident. Both duellists clashed several times.

Liara and Tali slowly regained consciousness. In the background they could hear swords clashing. They noticed some of the Helldivers where still alive. In particular, General Zartrack was pinned by debris.

"General, are you alright?"Asked Liara urgently.

Zartrack groaned slightly and then allowed Liara to help him up.

"Don't worry, Dr. T'soni. I've had worse." He said.

Balak and Austin continued to duel one another. With both being equally matched opponents it was more a case of trying new tactics. Austin had resorted more to defence and was trying to find a weakness in Balak's attacks that he could exploit. Metal blade met orange blade in an almost dazzling
display of swordplay. Austin's sword wove an intricate web of angles and curves, never truly fast but always just fast enough, each motion of his blade subtly interfering with Balak's strikes and lunges. This tactic was starting to pay off. Austin could tell that Balak was tiring, his breathing was becoming ragged and his attacks where slowing. He on the other hand still wasn't even breaking a sweat. He had done fencing even as a teenager, which as a result had made him very durable and able to fight for long periods. Back then though it had only been as a hobby. Zartrack's training had made him study fencing even more to the point where he had been said to be one of the best Helldivers with a sword. The only thing that did still make him second place to Zartrack was that the General always used martial arts in his sword play. Obviously though, he never used those arts when training his students since it was always unfair.

Balak snarled furiously at Austin continuing to effortlessly dodging or parrying his attacks. Eventually though he overloaded Austin's defence. That however was his undoing since that had been the move that Austin had been waiting for. He used his defence to attack. A subtle shift in the angle of a single parry brought his sword right across Balak's face, once again giving him another scar. This time on the left side of his neck.

Balak broke away and brought his left hand up to the now bleeding wound. Austin pointed his sword at Balak.

"It's over Balak! I missed your other eye on purpose. Don't force to kill you. Surrender now." He ordered.

"Never!" Balak yelled as he thrust again.

As the minutes passed in a flurry of parries, counter-attacks and sweeping flourishes Balak felt himself beginning to tire to the point of his arm feeling very heavy, and the sweat from his body causing the inner bits of his armour to stick to his skin didn't help. Ordinarily he could fight for hours without feeling any fatigue, but his already drained body was being pushed to its limit just to keep on a level footing with Austin. It was obvious to him that the Helldiver was the superior swordsman by far and only a clumsy mistake on his part or a healthy dose of luck on Balak's would result in his victory.

Apparently fate wasn't on the Batarian's side. As he parried a particularly vicious blow from Austin, he felt his foot catch of one of the tiny ridges formed where two plates of the metal floor met. Having to concentrate to prevent himself falling gracelessly to the floor, the Batarian wasn't prepared for Austin's follow up attack. By the time he saw the blade stabbing at his face, there wasn't time to put up any kind of proper defence. Instead, he desperately swatted at the sword with his omni blade, hoping to at least deflect the thrust to a less fatal part of his anatomy.

Austin's thrust missed Balak's ear by millimetres, glancing off a bit of the fountain behind him instead. Balak's arm however had ended up too far outwards and Austin was a fast reactor. With a swift movement of his arm, he swung his sword toward Balak's blade arm. He raised his sword just enough, and the blade scraped across his wrist, damaging his armour and at the same time severing a part of his omni tool.

Balak's blade flickered and then diapered. Without another, the Batarian now had nothing to fight Austin with. It was over.

Silence engulfed the room. Blinking and dazed, Liara, Tali, Zartrack and the remaining Helldivers that had managed to survive Balak's bomb traps hurried over to the sound of the fighting to see Balak backed against a wall, weapon less, his neck bleeding and Austin's sword a mere inch from his throat. The sudden calm was punctuated only by the sound of laboured breathing.
"I've won, Balak. It's over! Just accept that." Said Austin.

Balak groaned.


Austin lowered his sword, twirled it once and then placed it back in the holster on his back.

Two Helldivers walked up to Balak and placed him in cuffs.

"Get him out of my sight." Zartrack ordered.

The Helldivers marched Balak away. As they did, the Batarian glared back at them.

"Once again you've proven that I taught you too well." Said Zartrack as he patted Austin on the back. "We'll secure the rest of the sight. You can tell the hostages that they can come out now."

"Thank you, General." Said Austin.

The rest of the Helldivers disbanded. Simon then appeared and walked up to them.

"Commander, that was… I saw the whole thing. That was incredible." He said.

"Good to see that neither my skills or my blade have gone rusty. Has the asteroid been averted?" Austin asked.

"You did it. Another hour and our course would've been irreversible. Thank you for saving all of us." Said Simon.

He walked over to a door. Austin followed.

"Is Kate in here? Is she alright? Is her team?" he asked.

"I should think so." Austin answered.

"Shepard, thank you. For all that you've done." Said Simon.

Austin went over to the control panel and opened the door. Kate and the rest of her team where inside.

"I can't believe you managed to save us. I thought with you being a Helldiver, you'd sacrifice us to go after Balak." Said Kate.

"That's not what Helldivers do. We value human life over Batarian deaths." Said Austin.

"You sound just like my brother. He was always so stubborn but at the same time always willing to do the right thing." Said Kate.

"I'm sorry. I wish I could've saved him too." Said Austin.

"It's not your fault. You did what you could. At least Aaron died in a place he loved. He was the one who convinced me to join the team here. Said it would be an adventure. I—I don't mean to sound ungrateful, but I should see to Aaron." Said Kate.

"I understand. I'll get out of your way." Said Austin.

"Thank you—huh, I don't even know your name." said Kate.
"Shepard. Commander Shepard." Said Austin.

"Thank you, Commander. You're not exactly what I expected, but thank you." Said Kate

"I'll leave you now. So long Kate." Said Austin.

"Thank you for all you've done, Commander. Goodbye."

"You did well down there, Shepard. Not only did you save the asteroid and the colony of Terra Nova, but you also managed to capture Balak. We've been hunting that Batarian for too long." Said the lead councillor.

Austin had now returned to the Normandy. He was now just being congratulated by the Arkane Council.

"I'm just glad I got there in time, Councillors." Said Austin.

"Once again you've done us proud, Shepard. We're certain that as humanities first Spectre, you'll make us even more proud. Good luck, Commander." Said the lead councillor.

The Council vanished and Austin walked out of the comm room.

"Oh, before I go, you said you're serving with Commander Shepard now? We saw him on the news here. He's cute. Later sis."

Austin walked up behind Ashley and overheard the last bit of her message. He had a feeling, he knew who it was. Ashley noticed him and turned to face her old friend.

"Tell me you didn't hear that." She said.

"I'm afraid I did. That was one of your sisters, I presume?" Austin chuckled slightly.

"Yep. That is until I get home and kill her. That was Sarah, the youngest." Ashley explained. "Surprised to see you here though, sir. Thought that you'd be chatting up, what her's name... T'soni?"

"Liara? What makes you say that?" Austin asked, a slight hint of confusion in his voice.

"Some of the scuttlebutt says that you got a thing for her." said Ashley. "I could understand. Crew's off limits with the rags against fraternization, and at least she looks like a woman."

Austin was about to clarify and say that it wasn't just a rumor, but Ashley changed the subject before he could say anything.

"So what's up? I take it you didn't come by to eavesdrop on family mail?" Ashley asked.

"Just came down for a little chat. Your family seems important to you." Austin replied.

"Yeah. Even when we were young we've always been close. Me and my sisters especially. With dad on duty so much, I had to help mum raise them." Said Ashley.

"I know what that's like." Said Austin understandingly.
"Do you and your father still talk?" Ashley asked.

"We send messages to another and occasionally we do see each other in person when he briefly returns to Arkadia. Most of the time he's always out in the Terminus systems and the Traverse keeping the Batarians at bay so much." Austin replied.

"With schedules like today it's a wonder we ever have kids anymore. Things were tense between my sister and me for a while, then we, bonded." Said Ashley.

"How so?" Austin inquired.

"Dad always wanted to serve in space. Yet he wanted us to have ground under our feet. He said space is beautiful and all but you can't raise a family there. I cannot rest from travel. I will drink life to the lease. All time I have enjoyed greatly, have suffered greatly. Both with those that love me and alone. For always roaming with a hungry heart. Much have I seen and known. Cities of men and manners, climates, councils and governments.

"That was... unexpected." Said Austin, a bit surprised at Ashley's sudden quotation of poetry.

"Ulysses was my dad's favourite poem. Every time he sipped out, he recorded me reading it." Said Ashley.

"Does he still like it?" Austin asked.

"I sure hope so. I read it to his grave every time I go home. Dad passed on a few years back." Ashley replied sadly. "Besides he's probably still watching though, so behave." Said Ashley.

"Come again?" Austin asked in confusion.

"You know, from heaven. Wherever that is. That's not a problem with you is it? That I believe in God?" Ashley asked.

"Your beliefs are your business. I'm your Commanding officer, not your moral compass." Austin replied casually.

"Just my commanding officer, huh?" Ashley asked, in a rather suggestive tone.

Now Austin finally got what Ahsley had been suggesting. She was trying ot hit on him.

"Look... Ashley, all that scuttlebutt around the crew is not just rumors. Liara and I both have a thing for each other." he said, trying to be gentle as he said it.

Ashley though didn't seem convinced.

"Sir, I only said that as a joke to tease you. I wasn't trying to suggest anything with that." she chuckled.

"And I'm being serious, Ashley." Austin said, putting particular emphasis on the serious tone in his voice.

"You... and her?" Ashley asked in both disbelief and shock.

"Is there a problem, Chief?" Austin asked. He was begining to worry now. Had Ashley bene attracted to him all this time? Worse still, had he just broken her heart by saying that?
"With all due respect sir, you're humanity's first Spectre. A relationship with an alien... it could cause a lot of controversy." said Ashley.

"Well they'll just have to deal with it." said Austin defensively. "Liara and I both love each other and I'm not going to let a title stand in the way of that."

"But..."

"And that's my final word on the subject, Williams." he added sternly.

"Understood... sir." said Ashley, but she sounded bitter.

Austin couldn't help but feel concerned as he rode the elevator out of the cargo bay. He could only hope he wouldn't regret this down the line. Perhaps Ashley just needed time to calm down from this. Most of this had clearly stemmed from her having a crush on him after all.

Next chapter will probably involve the rouge VI on the moon and also the mission where Cerberus murder Admiral Kahoku.

Hope you enjoyed this chapter, also i hope the sword fight was okay. I'm a huge fan of sword fights and I do fencing as a hobbie, so it was very hard for me to resist the temptation to include sword fights in my story. Like to also point out that there will be another similar sword fight in the final battle an another in the next chapter, but in a way I'm sure you won't expect. Shepard will end up training one of his team to fence...

See you next time.
Chapter 14, The Calm before the Storm

Sorry this one took so long to make. Things have been unbelievably busy. To make matters worse, this chapter accidentally got corrupted while it was still half done and I had to start again.

Anyway, it's here now and finally finished. Enjoy.

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Chapter 14

The Calm before the Storm

Austin walked through the med bay and into Liara's quarters. She quickly took notice of him. She got up from her seat and kissed him.

"You said you had something you wanted to ask me?" he said.

"Yes. But I'm not sure how to ask it." Said Liara, nervously.

"Take your time, Liara. I'm a patient man and I always have time for you." Austin reassured her.

"Alright. You know back on that asteroid over Terra Nova, when you fought Balak with your sword?" Liara asked.

"Yes?" Austin replied.

"Well, I saw what you did and I suddenly wanted to learn more about sword fighting, or fencing as you call it. Having done some research, I…" Liara stuttered.

"Wait a minute. Are you saying you want to learn fencing?" Austin asked.

"More sort of try it. I was hoping you could show me the basics." Said Liara.

Austin was surprised by this. Had he heard right? Liara wanted him to teach her basic fencing.

"Liara, are you sure about that? I may be good at fencing but I don't know if I'm that good enough to teach you." Said Austin.

"It's only the basics. Besides, you're good enough for me in many ways." Liara said as she winked at him.

Austin chuckled slightly.

"Alright. I'll show you what it's like. If you think it's something you want to pursue then I can maybe make arrangements with Zartrack. He's the best fencing teacher." Said Austin.

At this sort of time on the Normandy, some of crew would set up a shooting range to practice the skills. They also arranged sparing matches if anyone was interested. In this case, Austin and Liara. Kaiden and Ashley where already practicing on the shooting range. They took notice of their commander and nodded to him, which Austin returned.

When Liara arrived she could see Austin holding a black rectangular box. He'd also detached his
sword from his Helldiver armour and now had strapped to his belt. Austin opened the box to reveal another sword. He handed it to Liara.

"This was the same sword that I trained with. I want you to have it now." He said.

Liara drew the sword from its holster and looked at it.

"You're sure you want me to keep it?" she asked.

"I've not really been sure what to do with it anyway ever since Zartrack gave me this one." Said Austin as he drew his own sword.

It was from there that Liara could see the large difference to his and the one she had. His sword had a guard on it to protect the users hand and also a small strand hanging loose from the hilt. From the looks of it though it was supposed to have that. Attached to the end of the strand was what looked like an Arkane Symbol. The most noticeable feature though was the blade, which had a gold centre and there was writing on it.

"What does that say?" she indicated to the writing. It was in Arkane and that was a language she didn't read. Austin looked at the side she had indicated to. The blade glinted brightly from the lights in the cargo bay.

"That's the sword's name, Excalibur." Said Austin.

"Why is it called that?" Liara asked. She couldn't help but think that she'd heard that name before.

"Have you ever heard of the legend of King Arthur?" Austin asked.

"I've heard of it when studying some human cultures but I'm afraid I don't know the basics." Liara answered.

"Well in that legend, the hero, King Arthur wielded a sword that was said to possess magical powers. General Zartrack always had a bit of a fascination with the legend. So much so, that when he forged this sword for me, he named it after the same sword in the legend." Austin explained.

Liara then noticed the other side. There was Arkane writing on that side as well, but it was different to the side she was looking at.

"What about that side?" she asked.

Austin turned the blade over and looked at the side that she'd indicated.

"That, is my name in Arkadian." He answered. He then handed Excalibur to Liara, she took it into her hand and compared it to the training one she had in her hand. There was definitely a significant difference. Excalibur was so much lighter than the training sword, it was also slightly larger, clearly designed for more combat.

"It's so light. It has almost no weight." Said Liara as she handed Excalibur back its master.

"But it cuts like steal. Zartrack forged it from Kartalrium. It's a rare but completely indestructible metal. I've had Excalibur for nearly seven years. It's been submerged in cold water, endured extreme heat, fought in many battles and it hasn't even shown the slightest signs of damage or rust." He said.

"It must be quite an honor to wield such a weapon." Said Liara.

"It is. Apart from this shoulder armour that my father gave me, this sword is one of my most
treasured possessions. And now it'll be the sword that teaches you.” Austin smiled.

"So, shall we?” Liara asked.

For the next few hours Austin started by teaching Liara the proper fencing stances and helping her improve her footwork. Surprisingly, she was actually much better at this than he had thought she would be. Duelling wise, Liara once again surprised her boyfriend. Her wrist movements seemed to match his perfectly. To start off they took the moves slowly so that Liara knew how to react to attacks and parries. As the moves sped up, Liara didn't even seem to falter. Apart from himself, Austin had never seen anyone do so well so quickly.

After several hours of blade clashing, the two lovers decided that they'd had enough for today. It was then that they both noticed that they'd gained a bit of a crowd. Almost everyone in the cargo bay had stopped what they were doing and had been watching for a good half hour.

"Alright everyone. Show's over. Back to your duties." Austin ordered.

The rest of the crew obeyed and the crowd dispersed. Austin then turned back to Liara.

"Well, what do you think? This something you might want to continue?” he asked.

"Definitely. Almost as fun as using biotics.” Liara replied. "Thank you for teaching me, Austin." She walked up to Austin gave him a long kiss.

"Commander, we're receiving an urgent message. I'm patching it through now." Came Joker's voice.

"Shepard, this is Admiral Kahoku. I found out who set that trap for my men. The ones killed by the Thresher Maw. Damn, I hope you get this message. It was Cerberus. I believe you and helldivers are familiar with the name." came Kahoku's voice.

Austin froze upon hearing the name Cerberus. Kahoku was right. It was name he was all too familiar with. Cerberus was some kind of human terrorist organisation. Cerberus' core belief was that humans deserved a greater role in the galactic community, and that the Systems Alliance was too hamstrung by law and public opinion to stand up effectively to the Citadel races. They also saw the Arkanes and Helldivers as selfish for not trusting other species with the secrets of their technology. The also seemed to think that any methods of advancing humanity's ascension was justified, including illegal or dangerous experimentation, terrorist activities, sabotage and assassination. Though Cerberus operatives accepted that these methods where brutal they seemed to think that history would vindicate them. As a result of this, the Systems Alliance, the Citadel Council and the Arkanes had declared Cerberus to be a terrorist organization and would gladly prosecute identified Cerberus agents accordingly. Cerberus had also constantly interfered with critical Helldiver operations. The Arkanes were also appalled at what Cerberus often did, and the fact that they were anti-alien. As a result, Cerberus was declared as the Helldiver's second arch enemy, next to the Batarians. For the past few years though, their operations had been very quiet. The fact that they'd made a comeback all of a sudden, worried Austin.

"They're conducting illegal genetic experiments. Trying to create some kind of super soldier. I don't have any proof but I found the coordinates for one of their research worlds. I'm uploading them with this message. They're completely out of control. Somebody needs to stop them. I've done my part, now it's up to you.” Kahoku finished.

"Joker! Lock onto those coordinates A.S.A.P!” Austin ordered.
The coordinates led the Normandy to the planet Binthu in the Yangtze System of the voyager cluster. This time the wind wasn't bad at all, plus the coordinates showed them the exact location of the Cerberus base. So it was okay to take the drop ship for this mission. Austin hadn't taken Ashley and Kaiden out together for a while, so he selected them.

When they entered the base Austin could already tell that something wasn't right. It was too quiet. As they entered the next room they could see what looked like a protective barrier. Inside, was a very unwelcome sight, Thorian Creepers, and they were crowded around a body.

Austin walked up to the nearby control panel and deactivated the field. Almost immediately the Creepers took notice of the soldiers and charged at them. At the same time, several Cerberus troops came into the room and opened fire. Austin could swear he heard one of them shout Helldiver.

Ashley and Kaiden dealt with both the Cerberus troops. Ashley provided cover fire for Kaiden with her rifle while he moved in closer so that he could use his biotics on the troops. Austin meanwhile dealt with the Creepers. Despite his best efforts to shoot them all however, some of them lunged at him and started to crawl all over him. Their claws didn't do much damage to him but the stuff that they vomited out of their mouths was absolutely disgusting. To make matters worse, Austin could hear a slight hissing sound.

"Oh hell no! Not acid! I just fixed my armour from the last one!" he thought to himself.

Without hesitating, Austin grabbed the nearest Creeper and threw it to the ground using all the enhanced strength that his suit could give him. Before the creeper could pick itself back up again, Austin brought his booted foot right down the zombie's head. A combination of Thorian goo and human blood splattered all over his armour.

"Great! Covered in goo again! It's times like this that I'm glad I wear this armour." He once again.

Still annoyed at the Creepers for ruining his armour again, Austin pulled Excalibur out of its holster and began slashing at the creepers.

Ashley and Kaiden meanwhile finished the last of the Cerberus troops. They noticed Austin struggling with the creepers and ran over to help him. Ashley managed to shoot two of them off of Austin while Kaiden was able to throw another away with his biotics. Only one remained. This one however was dangerously close to the Helldiver's head and was trying to claw its way through his helmet. It was too risky for either of them to interfere. Fortunately, they didn't need to. A quick movement from Austin's sword arm brought Excalibur right into the Creepers head. The creature struggled for a moment and then went limp.

With the creepers all dead, Austin took a moment to get his breath back.

"Thanks guys." He said to his comrades, still a bit out of breath.

Austin walked up to the body that the Creepers had been swarming around. Upon close inspection he saw who it was.

"Oh no. It's Kahoku." He said.

He knelt down in front of the Admiral's body. Upon closer inspection it didn't look as though the Admiral's death had been by the hands of the creepers. The needle marks on his arm indicated another means of death.

"I'm so sorry." He said as he closed Kahoku's eyes.
"Cerberus had Thorian Creepers? How is that even possible?"

Upon returning to the Normandy, Austin had made sure that he informed the Arkane council about this latest development with Cerberus.

"It could be possible that they knew about the Thorian on Feros as well." Austin suggested.

"We appreciate you informing us of this, Commander. We will have to be more vigilante with Cerberus from now on if they've been able to pull off things like this right under our noses." Said one of the Arkanes.

"Just doing my job." Said Austin.

With Normandy docked back at the Citadel for refueling, Austin had decided to take a small walk through the Presidium before heading back to the Normandy. He'd told the rest of the crew they could spend an hour or two on break if they wanted. Noveria was where they were heading next. For now though, everyone had time to enjoy the calm before the storm came back. He was very certain that Noveria wouldn't be a dead lead. They were bound to find something that would give them another piece of the puzzle. Something that would once again bring them closer to Saren.

As Austin descended the stairs from the elevator he could see an elderly man looking at him.

"Excuse me, Commander Shepard!" he said as he waved to the Helldiver.

Austin walked up to the man.

"Commander Shepard. My name is Samesh Bhatia. Forgive the intrusion, but I have nowhere else to turn." he said.

"What do you need?" Austin asked.

"My wife was a marine like you. She was in the 212 on Eden Prime." Samesh replied.

To Austin's utter surprise another voice sounded behind him. It was Ashley.

"Wait. The 212? Your wife was Serviceman Nirali Bhatia. I'm Gunnery Chief Ashley Williams. I served in her unit." She said.

Austin was surprised to see Ash, but it was a welcome surprise. The two friends merely nodded to one another as Ashley walked up and stood next to him.

"Chief Williams? It is a pleasure. Nirali spoke of you with great respect." Said Samesh.

"I'm so sorry for your loss, Me Bhatia. Nirali was a good woman. What can we do for you?" Ashley asked.

"I've requested that my wife's body be returned to me for cremation. But the military has refused my request." Samesh replied.

"Why'd they refuse? There must be some reason." Austin asked.

"I don't know. All I know is that they have declared it impossible for my wife to be returned to me." Said Samesh.

"Ash and I will look into this. Any idea who can talk to about this?" Austin inquired.
"The man in charge of my case is Mr Bosker. When I last saw him he was in the expensive bar over there." Said Samesh. He indicated to the bar where Austin had met Nassana Dantius a few days earlier. "Thank you for your time. I just want to give my wife a proper funeral and the respect she deserves."

The walk back to the bar was a quick one. Austin managed to spot Clerk Bosker immediately.

"My goodness, you're Commander Shepard." He said as he took notice of the Helldiver. "You're activities made for quite a briefing in the Diplomatic Corps! Is there something I can do to assist you?"

"Yes. A man named Samesh Bhatia is having trouble claiming his wife's body. He asked me to persuade you to give it back to him." Said Austin sternly.

"Commander, nothing would make me happier. I'm afraid, though, that it's not quite that simple. Serviceman Nirali Bhatia died on Eden Prime, as Mr Bhatia no doubt told you. Her wounds are inconsistent with any type of weapon damage we've seen before. That is why her body is being held." Said Bosker.

Austin however still didn't understand.

"It doesn't matter what the Geth did to her! It's Samesh's full right to claim his wife's body!" he said angrily.

"We are not holding Nirali Bhatia's body out of discretion. We are, frankly, holding the body for research. The test we are conducting may lead to better defences against Geth attacks. Respectfully, Serviceman Bhatia may save more lives in death than she did in life." Said Bosker.

Austin then lost it at that. He pinned Bosker hardly against the wall.

"You know who I am! If I want Nirali Bhatia, I'll get her!" he said.

"Commander, there's no need for threats. Even if the body was here on the Citadel, would you really risk going in, shooting, to get it?" Bosker objected.

"I've broken in many places that are heavily fortified and I'm still alive. The occupants of those bases where dead within minutes. You think you're people have better chances?!"

"Alright, Commander. You win. It was hard enough refusing Mr Bhatia. I'm not gonna risk and incident by refusing you. Tell Samesh that the body is being shipped back to Earth. I'll go now to see to it myself."

"Hello again, Commander. Has there been any word?" he asked.

"I reminded Mr Bosker what we're fighting for. Your wife's coming home. I'll also see to it personally that her name is one of the first to be added to the memorial that's being built on Eden Prime." Said Austin.

"Thank you. I will return home and begin my preparations. It does not bring me happiness, but it may bring me peace. Goodbye, Commander." Said Samesh as he walked.

"You always did have a kind heart, Austin." Said Ashley.
"Yeah. I know. So, ready to head back to the ship?"

There we go. Hope that was okay.

Next chapter will indeed be Noveria. However it won't be for some time. I promised a Youtube friend that I'd help him with his own series, so I'm going to have to divide my time between writing and filming. Rest assured though I'm not going stop.

Hope you didn't mind me naming Shepard's sword Excalibur. It's just that I couldn't think of a better name for the sword.

See you soon. Tell me what you think in reviews.
Hi there. Fortunately I haven't heard anything back yet from my Youtube friend so I've been able to work on this chapter and I'm already writing 16. I'm aiming for the next one to be more horror like since Shepard and his team will be encountering a species they don't know about (The Rachni) and they're all on their own.

So expect there to be some rather gory, violent bits in Chapter 16.

Hope you enjoy this chapter at least.

Chapter 15

Secrets of Noveria

Noveria brought back a lot of old memories to Austin. He had been to Noveria once before when he was around fifteen years old. His father and mother had agreed to take shore leave in order to spend a holiday with their son and daughter. Noveria was a snow planet. It wasn't the absolute best place for a holiday, but that didn't stop a lot of people from trying. Even in this time and age, skiing was still popular among humans. The sudden memory of skiing with his family suddenly made Austin think something.

"I wonder if Liara might be interested in that?" he thought.

After a moment though, he reconsidered. He was a rubbish skier. In fact the last time that he had been skiing he had gone madly out of control and almost lost a leg and an arm.

Austin stood on the bridge behind Joker. As the Normandy entered Noveria's cold atmosphere the radio crackled into life.

"Approach Control, this is the SSV Normandy. Requesting a vector and a berth." Said Joker.

"Normandy, your arrival was not scheduled. Our defence grid is armed and tracking you. State your business." The control voice responded.

"Charming. That's nice warm welcome." Austin thought sarcastically.

"Citadel and Helldiver business. We got a Helldiver Spectre aboard." Said Joker.

There was a brief pause.

"Landing access granted, Normandy." The voice eventually replied.

Joker slowly brought the Normandy into the nearest docking bay.

"Be advised, we will be confirming identification on arrival. If confirmation cannot be established, your vessel will be impounded."

"What a fun bunch. I think I'll take my next leave here." Said Joker, sarcastically.

Austin merely shook his head and went to get his gear.
He decided this time on taking Liara and Wrex for this mission. As they assembled in the cargo bay they could already feel the cold atmosphere.

"I hate the cold." Said Wrex.

"I agree. The sooner we are of this frozen world the better." Said Liara, who had just finished fastening her helmet on.

"It'll be warmer in the main building guys. Don't worry." Said Austin. "Come on. Let's see if these reports on the Geth being here where true."

As soon as they neared the entrance however they were greeted by three guards. A Turian, a blonde female and the leader, a dark haired Japanese female.

"That's fair enough." Said the leader.

The group stopped before the guards.

"Don't worry; we're not here to cause problems. We're just here in important business." Said Austin reassuringly.

"This is an unscheduled arrival. I need your credentials." The leader replied.

"You first." Said Austin.

"We're the law here. Show some respect!" Said the blonde one.

"I wasn't talking to you, Blondie!" Austin retaliated. He turned back to the leader. "Sorry."

"You're apology is unnecessary, that comment from sergeant Stirling was uncalled for. I'm Captain Maeko Matsuo." Said the leader.

"Commander Shepard of the Helldivers." Said Austin.

Technically, Noveria wasn't in Council or Alliance space. He felt it would be better not to identify himself as a Spectre.

"Load of horsecrap, ma'am." Said the blonde one.

"Is this how you greet everyone?" Austin asked annoyingly.

"We will need to confirm that you're a Helldiver. Also I must advise you that firearms are not permitted on Noveria. Sergeant Stirling, secure their weapons." Captain Matsuo ordered.

Sergeant Stirling walked up to the group but both Austin and Wrex drew their guns on her. Liara also flared up her biotics.

"Don't even try it!" Wrex threatened.

"Easy now everyone. Let's not start a fight." Austin urged as he tried to calm the situation.

"Why not?" Wrex asked.

"I'm sorry, Commander. But I'm afraid I cannot allow you to proceed with those weapons unless you are who you claim to be." Said Captain Matsuo.
"Then how about this? You let us keep our weapons, and we simply wait here until our identities are confirmed. Does that sound fair?" Austin asked.

"You expect us to trust you? Fuck that! How do we even know you won't shoot us in the back?" Sergeant Stirling asked.

"At this rate, if you don't shut up with that bitchy attitude of yours, I just might!" Austin retaliated. His gun was now more focused on Stirling than it was on the other two guards.

"That's enough Sergeant! Both of you stand down!" Captain Matsuo ordered. "She turned back to Austin. "That is fair."

Both the guards lowered their weapons. Austin also signalled for Liara and Wrex to do the same. After a few minutes passed, a voice suddenly spoke over the speakers.

"Captain Matsuo, let them pass." It said. "We've confirmed their identity. Helldivers are authorised to carry weapons here. This one's also a Spectre." Came the female voice.

"Great. So much for keeping a low profile." Austin sighed in his head. "See, what did I tell you?" he then said to the guards.

"You may proceed, Spectre. I hope the rest of your visit will be less confrontational. Parasini-san will met you upstairs." Said Captain Matsuo.

"Behave yourself." Said Stirling.

"You behave yourself, you Bitch!" Austin didn't say it out loud, but he was very tempted.

As they proceed through the doors they could feel the warm heat of indoors.

"That's better." Said Wrex.

When they reached the top of stairs however, alarms started to go off. The team looked around, slightly confused.

"Weapon detectors. Don't mind the alarms." Said a woman at the desk. She was dressed in a pink dress.

"Thanks, I guess." Said Austin. "And you are?"

"I am Gianna Parasini, assistant to Administrator Anoleis. We apologize for the incident in the docking bay." The woman answered.

"I hardly blame them. Just doing their job. Though your Sergeant has a serious attitude problem. Someone piss in her coffee today?" Austin asked.

"She takes her job seriously. She is a valuable asset to the company. Though I do agree she should be more polite, sometimes." Parasini replied. "One of my duties is orientation of new arrivals. Do you have any question?"

"We had reports that there'd been Geth sightings here. Has anyone unusual passed through here recently?" Austin asked.

"As far as I am aware we've never seen any Geth here. But since you ask about anyone unusual. An Asari Matriarch passed through a few days ago. Lady Benezia." Parasini answered.
Both Austin and Liara froze.

"Did I just hear that correctly? Did you say Benezia?" Austin asked.

"That is correct." Parasini replied.

"She-? She is here?" Liara tried to say.

"We need to speak with her right away. Do you know where she is?" Austin asked.

"I'm afraid Benezia left for the Peak 15 research complex days ago. To the best of my knowledge, she's still there." said Parasini.

"Then we'll need directions to get there. Who do we talk to about that?" Austin asked.

"You'll need to ask Administrator Anoleis for clearance to leave this port." Parasini answered.

"Where is he then?" Austin asked.

"His office is on the main level. Left at the top of the elevator." Said Parasini.

"Understood. Can we go in now?"

"Of course. If you need any help, you can ask me at the administrator's office." Said Parasini as she walked off.

Austin turned to Liara. She looked worried.

"She is here. I can't believe it. I imagine you want to talk to me, Austin. About my mother." She said.

"No I don't. I trust you with my life, Liara. Hell, I love you. You may not be military, but you're part of my crew." Said Austin as he put his hand reassuringly on her arm.

"Thank you, Austin. That means a great deal to me." Said Liara as she smiled at her boyfriend through her helmet.

After a quick elevator ride, the team found themselves in a large room. It was very well designed though and it was very warm, so it was a welcome sight. From out of the window, it was clear there was a major storm going on.

"Every time I come here, there's always a damn blizzard." Wrex complained.

"Thank the Goddess it's warm in here." Said Liara.

The administrator's office wasn't hard to find. It was just a simple walk down the stairs and threw the doors. Gianna Parasini was waiting for them.

"How can I help you?" she asked.

"I need to speak to Anoleis." Said Austin.

"Of course. One moment, please." She said as she pushed button on her desk. "Mr Anoleis?"

"Yes. What? What!" came a Salarian's voice.

"Commander Shepard is asking to see you, sir." Parasini answered.
"Right, fine. Send him in." Anoleis replied.

The three walked through the doors behind Gianna and found themselves face to face with Anoleis.

"You will excuse me if I don't stand up, Helldiver. I have no time to entertain refugees from that urban blight called Earth." Said Anoleis.

Austin could already tell that Anoleis wasn't pleased to see them. He also had that look about him that suggested he was hiding things. Then again the whole place seemed to feel that way. He also found it amusing that Anoleis had presumed he was from Earth. Despite his temptation to tell the Salarian to watch his mouth, he felt it best to not threaten a person who could make things difficult for him.

"We won't take up much of your time." He said.

"This greeting is a courtesy. I will only cooperate as required by the Executive Board. Businesses come here to avoid the second-guessing of galactic law." Said Anoleis.

"You're saying you have no safety protocols?" Austin asked.

"Don't be ridiculous. Do you think a for-profit company would take no precautions against loss of life and material? Project leads have the final say here. Not meddlesome politicians." Anoleis retaliated.

"We've heard an Asari Matriarch is here. Benezia?" Austin inquired.

"She arrived a few days ago, accompanied by a personal escort and some cargo. She is up at Peak 15." Said Anoleis.

"We need to see her here immediately." Said Austin.

"I'm afraid that you cannot. Peak 15 is a private facility in the Skadi Mountains. Regardless, there is a blizzard in the area. Shuttles are grounded, and surfaces access been cut off." Said Anoleis.

"Surface access, you say?" Austin inquired.

"Cut off, I said. The roads are not suitable for travel. Don't make an issue of this, Shepard." Said Anoleis.

Austin glared at Anoleis through his helmet. "It's obvious that he's not gonna help us. He's definitely hiding something," He thought.

"Austin. I am sure there are other people here who could help us." Liara said quietly. Austin nodded to her in agreement.

"I have no more question at this time." He said to Anoleis.

"Good. I receive a dozen urgent messages while you dithered about." Said Anoleis.

"What is it about this place that makes everyone so rude and impolite?" Austin thought.

As they walked out of Anoleis office, Parasini waved them over.

"You've never worked in the corporative world, have you, Commander? You can't bludgeon through bureaucracy." she said.
"Watch me! I can bludgeon pretty hard if I have to!" Said Austin. "Still, it's obvious that Anoleis isn't going to be helpful."

"Talk to Lorik Qui'in. You should be able to find him at the hotel bar. Can't say more. Not within earshot of Mr Anoleis" Said Parasini.

"I do not like this place. Too many dark secrets." Said Liara as they entered the bar.

"I agree with you, love. Everything about this place feels wrong." Said Austin.

They spotted the Turian, Lorik Qui'in, very quickly. As they made their way towards him though, they were stopped by an Asari in a yellow dress.

"Excuse me. I need a moment of your time." She said.

"Fine. But make it quick. I'm on important business." Said Austin.

"The male human at the hotel bar. He is a sales rep for Binary Helix. His name is Rafael Vargas. I need you to speak with him." Said the Asari.

"What? I'm sorry, you must have me confused with someone else. Have we met before?" Austin asked, confused.

"Everyone here knows who you are, dull stone. That makes you ideal for my job. You are a known quantity. Or so Vargas will think. He will assume you are here to investigate his company's dirty laundry. That will distract him from your—my—real intentions." Said the Asari.

"You expect me to trust you? We've only just met. Besides, strange people skulking in corners have presented trouble for me before." Said Austin suspiciously.

"I represent the Armali City Council on Thessia. Our town is known for its biotic amp crafters." Said the Asari.

"What is your city's interest in Binary Helix? They do not manufacture amps." Liara asked, also suspicious of the strange Asari.

"Much of BH's work relates to biotics. There are rumours that the Noveria branch has flown in Asari biotics. Powerful ones. Commando, to be specific." Sais the Asari. She cast a glance at Liara as she said it. "We want to assess any potential risk to Asari copyrights. You will present yourself as a byer. On behalf of the Spectres or the Alliance. Or maybe even the Helldivers, since you are one. Discuss their military enhancement programs. Your real objective will be to distract him. I will give you a device that will crack into his personal wireless network. It will upload a variety of monitoring viruses. They will infiltrate Binary Helix when he logs onto their intranet."

"You think this armour's just for show? My job is to enforce justice, not break the law." Austin refused.

"Do you think that Binary Helix obeys all the laws? That they do not spy on other companies?" the Asari asked.

"What they might be doing somewhere else doesn't justify my acting against them here." Austin refused again.

"Very well, Helldiver. I'll be on my way." Said the Asari coldly as she walked away.
Having dealt with that matter, Austin and his comrades headed over to Lorik Qui'in.

"Afternoon. Sit down, have a drink." The Turian greeted them. Austin politely declined. "What can I
do for you?"

"You're Lorik Qui'in I take it? I've heard you might be able to help me." Said Austin.

"You are the Spectre that just arrived, are you not? What could an old Turian like me possibly help
you with?" Qui'in asked.

"I'm Commander Shepard of the Helldivers. If you think I'm a Spectre, I'm afraid you're very
mistaken." Said Austin. He still felt it would be better to keep a low profile.

"It's too late for cover-ups, Commander." Said Qui'in. "Your picture has been sent to every
employee. They have been warned that speaking to you is grounds for termination. I am Lorik
Qui'in. For the moment, I am the manager of the Synthetic Insights office."

"For the moment?" Austin asked.

"Mr Anoleis closed my office. He claims to be investigating reports of my corruption. The
administrator is an interesting man. He has become quite wealthy since he took direct control of
rents." Said Qui'in.

"I sense a connection there." Said Austin as he folded his arms.

"Indeed. I acquired evidence of Anoleis' actions. His hired goons are ransacking my office to find it.
I suspect your goal lies outside this port. Mr Anoleis would be disinclined to let you wander. If you
recover the evidence from my office, I will give you my garage pass, as well as a sum of credits." Said
Qui'in.

Austin nodded. "That sounds like a fair trade."

"Violence against Mr Anoleis' thugs may be necessary. He has members of Hanshan's security team
searching my offices. He is paying them under the table. Ms Matsuo is unaware of their outside
employment." Qui'in advised.

"If he's paying them under the table, they're mercenaries. I can kill mercenaries." Said Austin as he
cracked his knuckles.

"Excellent. Here is my pass into our offices. It will activate the elevator. The evidence is on my
office computer. This OSD contains an encryption key to access it. Slide it into the drive and it will
auto-execute." Said Qui'in as he handed Austin the OSD he had mentioned earlier. "And do try to
keep blood stains off the carpets, would you?"

Austin, Liara and Wrex proceeded to the elevator that would take them to the synthetic insights
office. As they entered they were greeted by two guards.

"Freeze! Hanshan security. This office is sealed" said the female guard.

"Lorik Qui'in gave me a pass in." said Austin. He'd rather avoid a fight.

"Qui'in? Are you working for him? He's under investigation." Said the guard.

"Anoleis is paying you to shake this place down. Does Captain Matsuo know you're here?" Austin
asked.
"Hey, I'm not the one who wants Qui'in. Anoleis has a Varren up his ass about this guy. How about this? You pretend you didn't see us, we'll pretend we didn't see you." Said the guard. Some of the others that had been with the guard left with her. There where however some that stayed, and they opened fire on the group. Instantly, they all dove for cover. Austin threw a flash bang grenade which then blinded them, giving Liara the opportunity to slam several of them into the wall. Wrex meanwhile just blasted away with his shotgun. Once they'd dealt with the corrupt guards, they found Qui'in's office. After acquiring the evidence, they headed back. However they found their path blocked by a few more Guards and Sergeant Stirling.

"What does that bitch want now?" Austin thought.

"I don't think you're supposed to be in here, Shepard." She said.

"Neither are you Miss…?" said Austin.

"Oh, now you're going to show some respect? I'm Sergeant Kaira Stirling, Elanus Risk Control Services." Said Stirling.

"Oh yes. The one with the attitude problem." Said Austin. He wasn't scared of her. He'd faced far worse than a few corrupt security guards in his time.

"Anoleis would have you thrown off world for what you did here. I won't. You know what we did to cop killers on my world?" Stirling asked.

"Bored them to death with your attitude?" Austin replied sarcastically.

"You're breaking the law for bribe money. You know what we do to dirty cops on my world?" Wrex said as he joined in.

"They brought it on themselves. I didn't want to fight them. They fired first." Said Austin.

"Well, I don't need a gun to rip you to pieces, Helldiver." Said Stirling as she charged up her biotics.

"Neither do I, Kaira." said Austin. With lighting fast movements, he unsheathed his combat knife and threw it at Stirling. The knife moved too fast for her to react in time and it stabbed her right in the heart. "Not so tough now, are you?"

"Kill…them!" Stirling spluttered as she drew her last breath and blood started to trickle from her mouth and chest.

The other guards raised their weapons, but the group was too quick for them. Liara had them caught in her singularity in seconds, Wrex shot five others down with his shotgun and Austin sliced one with his omni blade.

"Come on. Let's get out of here." Said Austin as he removed his knife from Stirling's body, pausing only to give it a clean.

As they exited the elevator though, surprisingly they found Parasini waiting for them.

"What now?" Austin thought.

"Commander. There've been reports from the Synthetic Insights office. Would you know anything about it?" she asked.

"I'm not admitting to that." Austin thought. "Must be Anoleis's thugs ripping the place apart." He
"Smartass, hm? That's fine. I can work with that." Said Parasini.

"Excuse me?" Austin asked.

"Meet me at the hotel for a drink, before you talk to Qui'in. I'll be waiting." Gianna responded as she walked off.

"Why do I get the feeling she's hiding something?" Liara asked.

"Let's find out." Said Austin.

With that they headed back to the bar. Being a man of his words, he went for Gianna first.

"Okay, we did what you wanted. But I'm not buying you being Anoleis's assistant anymore. There's something behind that innocent look. I'm not saying anything more to you until I get some answers." He said as his group joined her at her table.

"Allow me to reintroduce myself. Parasini, Noveria Internal Affairs." Said Gianna.

"I knew it! I knew it had to be uncover work. So why is an Internal Affairs agent here?" Austin asked.

"The Executive Board knows about Anoleis' corruption. I've been undercover for six months. I need you to convince Qui'in to testify before the Board. With his evidence, this planet can run profitability again." Said Gianna.

"Okay, listen Gianna. I would gladly help you, but I need Qui'in garage pass to get to Peak 15 to complete my mission." Said Austin. He did his best though to sound polite. Now that he knew what was going on, he did wish he could Gianna. But he doubted that Qui'in would give him his garage pass if the evidence was withheld.

"If you help my investigation, I can provide you with whatever you need. Favour for a favour." Said Gianna.

"In the long run, it is better to remove the source of the problem." Said Liara.

"I know that, Liara. But finding your Mother is our top priority." Said Austin regretfully.

"Look, Shepard. I don't like this either. Spectres play fast and loose with the law. That's bad for business. But you're a Helldiver. They're nowhere near as selfish as Spectres are." Said Gianna.

"All right, all right. I'll talk to Qui'in and see if I can convince him. I make no promises though. It won't be my fault if he refuses." Said Austin.

"I can't see why he wouldn't. He feels as strongly about Anoleis's corruption as I do." Said Gianna. "But thank you. I was worried you'd refuse on the spot. You know where I work. Come talk to me once you know if he'll play ball."

Gianna walked off while Austin headed back to Qui'in's table.

"Always a pleasure, Helldiver. Any news on that matter I asked you to look into?" he asked.

"I finished the job. But an internal Affairs investigator contacted me. She wants you to testify against Anoleis." Said Austin.
"Now that you have my property, you want to dictate how I use it? I have no interest in a public spectacle." Qui'in objected.

"Come on, Austin. Think. Think!" Austin's kept telling himself. Then he thought up a good enough answer. "Everyone on this station is chafing under Anoleis' extortion. You might end up a hero." He said.

"My employers rely on the goodwill of the Executive Board to work here." Said Qui'in.

"If these "executives" don't blame Anoleis for provoking this, they're fool. You should eat them." Said Wrex.

Both Austin and Liara did their best not laugh at this. A giggle escaped from Austin while Liara lost it a bit. But she quickly calmed down.

"All right! It is obvious that I cannot dissuade you. Very well. I will testify. Make whatever arrangements you need with your contact. I will wait here." Said Qui'in.

"You're doing the right thing, Lorik. Trust me." Said Austin.

A quick walk back to the administrator's office brought the group back into Gianna's presence.

"So? What did Qui'in say?" she asked.

"It's your lucky day, Gianna. It took some persuasion, but Qui'in has agreed to testify." Said Austin.

Gianna gave a heavy sigh of relief. "That's a world of stress off my back. I'll take the evidence for safe transport. I didn't think you'd help me. Being a Spectre and all. But then you are also a Helldiver, so I guess I could've had higher hopes. I guess not all Spectres are bad." She said.

"Doesn't this help you? You don't seem particular happy." Said Austin.

"I'm ecstatic. In fact, if you weren't wearing that helmet right now I'd kiss you. But right now, I just feel like a long day of work is ending." Said Gianna.

"I'm glad I was able to help. But don't forget that we had a deal." Austin reminded Gianna.

"Don't worry, Shepard. I haven't forgotten. While you were working on Qui'in, I got a garage pass. Be careful up there." Said Gianna as she handed a garage pass card to Austin. "I have an arrest to make. Wish I had time to change into something easier to move in. I hate skirts."

A minute later Austin could hear commotion. Then the door opened. Gianna had Anoleis' hands pinned behind his back.

"This is an outrage! I'll see that you never work in this sector again!" Anoleis shouted angrily as Gianna hauled him out of his own office.

"Yeah, yeah. Get a move on." Gianna ordered. Austin couldn't help but smile smugly behind his helmet.

"You! Helldiver! I demand you place this bitch under arrest!" Anoleis yelled.

"You have the right to remain silent; I wish to God you'd exercise it." Austin said smugly.

"See you round around the galaxy, Commander. I owe you a beer." Said Gianna as she led Anoleis out of the doors.
"Alright. Now that that's out of way, let's do what we came here to do." Said Austin. "Next stop, the garage."

As the group approached the entrance to the garage they were met by a guard.

"Access to the garage is restricted." She said nervously. She was obviously afraid that the armed group might try something.

"I have authorisation. Excuse me." Said Austin as he presented the garage pass.

"Yes, that's genuine. Drive safely. The weather's supposed to be pretty bad in the Aleuts Valley." Said the guard.

The doors opened and they proceeded in. As they entered though, Austin's suit readings went mad.

"Warning! Geth detected!" said his suit's computer. Right on cue several Geth troopers, hoppers and even a few primes appeared from behind the crates in the garage. They took notice of the group and fired on them.

"Geth! Get to cover!" Austin yelled.

Almost immediately, Wrex and Liara dove for cover. Austin did the same.

"Guess we know now what Benezia had in her cargo crates." Said Wrex as he returned fire at the Geth. Austin and Liara quickly joined in. They had to blind fire a lot since the Geth where all concentrating on their position. This made it difficult for to aim long enough. Eventually though, they managed to gun down the last Geth. Some of the guards, led by Captain Matsuo came into the garage to see what all the commotion had been.

"What the—What are these things? Fan out and secure the area! No one gets in or out!" she ordered to her guards. She then turned to Austin and his comrades. "What did you do here, Commander?"

"Me? We're the victims here! The Geth attacked us!" Austin objected as he stood up from where he'd been crouched behind a crate.

"Geth? You expect us to believe…" Matsuo began to say. She stopped however when she got a much closer look at one of the Geth corpses. "Where did they come from?"

"The Asari bitch had a bunch of cargo with her. They must've been in the shipping containers." Said Wrex.

"I don't believe that. We did thorough scans of those. There were no sources, no element zero masses…" said Matsuo. "If Benezia-sama's containers were packed with these things, there are many more out there."

"This day just keeps getting better and better." Said Wrex.

"Dozens? Hundreds?" Austin asked.

Hundreds at least. They're machines. You can pack them tightly. I must report to the Executive Board. If word gets out about loose Geth, there may be an investor panic." Matsuo replied as she headed out of the garage.

The weather was still far too dangerous for flight. Even for a Hellhound drop ship, flying in conditions like these was a death wish. Fortunately, the Mako was waiting in the garage for them.
"Everyone buckle up tight. It's gonna one hell of a ride." Said Austin as they all climbed in.

Okay, assuming something doesn't come up, I may have Chapter 16 up soon. If not then things have got busy. If so, I do apologise for that.

We're getting closer to Virmie now. I'm actually surprised that I've managed to get this far into the story so quickly. That is good though.
Here we go! The scary chapter. I've done my best to try make it scary and eerie. Just a bit of warning that this chapter is very gory and violent, and a bit sad as well when Benezia dies.

Anyway, I hope you really enjoy this one because I had a lot of fun writing it.

Chapter 16

Alone in the Dark

The drive to the peak 15 research facility was not an easy one. The roads to the mountains had been crawling with Geth. Plus the blizzard hadn't helped either. Eventually though they reached Peak 15. However, the entrance to the garage area was blocked by debris.

"The Mako should be safe out here. We'll have to go in on foot." Said Austin as he unlocked the Mako's hatch.

A huge gust of cold, snowy wind entered the Mako's cabin. Austin, Liara and Wrex climbed out.

"Bloody hell! Even with my suits heating system, it's bloody freezing out here." Said Austin.

Once they were inside they closed the door. None of them bothered with removing their helmets though. Austin always wore his, Liara liked wearing hers, and Wrex wasn't bothered either way. They made their way through the entrance and into the garage area where they would've entered earlier. As they did however, several Geth appeared out of cover. With them also where several Krogan. The three comrades dove for cover as they were once again fired on.

"Liara, Wrex, deal with the Krogan. I'll worry about the Geth!" Austin ordered.

Liara and Wrex nodded to show that they understood.

Within seconds, the whole Peak 15 garage became a cauldron of battle. Wrex rolled around on the floor with the largest hostile Krogan, punching him in the face repeatedly and wielding his shotgun like a sword, while his opponent tried to keep up with the Battlemaster. Liara had picked up two of the Krogan and was pounding their faces to dust with warp after warp. Austin meanwhile was stuck behind a crate with several Geth firing on him. There was too much fire for him to lean out of cover and aim at the Geth. He resorted to blind firing but that didn't work. Then he remembered a trick he'd once used on a mission involving several targets. He took a smoke grenade from his combat belt and threw it at the Geth's feet. It exploded, surrounding the Geth in a large amount of smoke. It was so thick that they couldn't see anything. Taking advantage of their blindness, Austin cloaked and went out of cover. He quickly, but quietly, placed a few small detonators on their feet. He then retreated back to the spot where he'd been in cover. As they smoke cleared, the Geth could see Austin looking at them.

"Say goodbye to your kneecaps!" he said as he activated the detonators. They started to beep. The Geth looked down at their feet to see the devices flashing. Only too late did they realise what was about to happen. The detonators exploded obliterating all the Geth's legs.

"Not so tough without legs are you?" said Austin as he shot the struggling Geth in their heads.

"Nice trick, Shepard." Said Wrex as the group re-joined and headed up the nearby stairs.
When they opened the door they found themselves in a hallway. There where two turrets in the hallway. However they were facing the entrance, rather than the exit.

"Why are the turrets pointing the wrong way?" Liara asked.

"They want to keep their own people in as much as they want to keep others out." Said Wrex.

The narrow tunnels of Peak 15 kept making Austin very nervous. It wasn't that he was claustrophobic or anything, only it was that tight tunnels, very little light and no sounds at all often meant that something was wrong.

"Do any of you hear that?" he asked.

"Hear what?" Liara asked, slightly confused.


"Too quiet." Wrex added.

Suddenly, a loud voice echoed out all over the tunnels. It sounded like a VI

"User alert. All Peak 15 facilities have suffered a great deal of damage." It said.

"Goddess! That made me jump." Said Liara as she calmed down from the adrenaline.

"Me too. Keep your guard up everyone. I've got a bad feeling about this." Austin advised them as they continued through the tunnels. Then the VI spoke again.

"Alert! Biohazard materials present through facility. Virtual Intelligence user interface offline." It said.

"As if this couldn't sound anymore like something out of a horror movie." Austin sighed.

"We'll need to get the reactors back online." Said Liara.

Just as Liara finished speaking however the whole complex seemed to emit loads of loud creeks. Then a terrifying shriek echoed through the tunnels.

"What the hell was that?" Wrex asked. He kept his cool, but even he had to admit, things where starting to get scary.

"You two, keep close to me and stay alert. We're not alone down here." Austin advised.

As they proceeded further and further into Peak 15 the whole atmosphere grew even darker and even more eerie. Liara was starting to shiver. Goosebumps where forming on her skin. Austin however noticed her shaking and gently put his hand on her shoulder.

"It's alright, Liara. As long as we stick together we'll be safe." He said calmly.

Austin's words where like a little, calming song to Liara. She stopped shivering and smiled at him through her helmet.

"If it helps at all, you're not the only one that's scared. Even I'm a bit nervous. Something's clearly wrong here." he then added.
It made Liara feel a bit better to know that the fear was a natural reaction and that she wasn't just being cowardly.

Eventually, the dark tunnel ended. Unfortunately the door at the end simply opened up into more darkness. From what they could see, they were standing inside a large room. All the lights where broken, the windows had been covered by the safety panels, blocking out Noveria's sun and the whole place was a mess.

"Goddess. What happened here?" Liara asked.

Suddenly, just as they entered the room, the door behind them slammed shut and the whole room went pitch black. Austin tried to reopen the door, but it wouldn't budge.

"We're stuck in here." He said.

"I can't see a damn thing." Said Wrex.

Austin took his flashlight attachment from his combat belt and strapped it to his rifle. Once he had turned it on, he took two more from his belt and handed them to his comrades. He then activated some more very small headlights on his helmet. The extra light helped illuminate some of the darkness but that still didn't erase the feeling that something would suddenly lunge at them out of the darkness.

As if on cue the whole place once again shook violently and creaked. Then the scream echoed out again, louder this time.

"What was that?" Liara asked, now very frightened. Her hands shook as she slowly scanned the area using the flashlight attachment.

"Probably debris. Don't have a panic attack. I'll protect you." Said Wrex. Austin could tell that Wrex didn't really mean what he said. He was just trying to keep Liara from freaking out. He edged a bit closer to his girlfriend to try and comfort her.

Suddenly Liara recoiled back in fright and screamed.

"What? What is it?" Austin asked.

"I just saw something!" Liara said as she tried to calm down.

Austin moved his light beam over to where Liara had last shone hers. There was nothing there.

"I didn't imagine that, Austin! I promise you, there was something there!" said Liara.

"I did say don't have a panic attack." Wrex reminded her.

"No offense, Wrex. But shut up! That's not helping!" Austin said in defence of Liara. "What did you see?" he then asked the Asari.

"I don't know. I only saw it for a second before it scared me. It looked like some sort of big bug, it was green and covered in blood, but I don't think the blood belonged to it" Liara said through chattering teeth.

All three of team stood still where they were. They were in what looked like the centre of the room. It was hard to tell though, the only lights they had where the flashlights and they weren't designed for full illumination.
Then a strange sound began to fill the air. Footsteps. They didn't sound like normal footsteps though, the sounded more like bugs. Austin shone his lights around more but they didn't reach far enough to see the walls. But from what he could see, it looked like the walls where moving. There was definitely something else in the room with them, and from the looks of things, there was more than one. The sounds began to grow louder and then they were joined by a disturbing chirping sound.

"Something's in here with us!" said Liara.

Austin really had to admire his girlfriend's bravery. Even a normal Helldiver would be panicking by now. He did his best to keep his cool. In fact he wasn't that worried about the noise, he was more worried about Liara. Out of all of them, her armour was the most fragile, despite the upgrades. Austin's armour was stronger and although Wrex's armour was about the same as hers he compensated for that a tremendous amount of endurance, strength and Krogan had redundant nervous systems. True Liara had her biotics, but they were no good if she couldn't see her attacker.

"Where? I don't see anything!" said Wrex as he frantically moved his light around.

"There's definitely something moving in here, and it isn't us." Austin thought. His motion tracker was also off the scale. There was movement all other the place. If there was something alive in here, it had them surrounded. Austin didn't know what to do. If they killed the lights it would make them impossible to see. But at the same time, it could be exactly what these things wanted them to do. Perhaps the flashlights where the only thing keeping them from being attacked. Eventually he came to a decision.

"We need more light." He thought.

Despite the fact that it could make them even more visible than they were now, he took a flare from his belt and lit it. He then threw it into the darkness. The whole room now lit up. Just as the flare landed, the team caught a very brief glimpse of several little creatures scurrying away from the bright light. It was only brief, but Austin could not deny that those had been some type of insect. But they had been massive. As the last of the insects retreated, the walls stopped moving and the noises stopped.

While they were relived to be able to see now, at the same time they were now wishing they couldn't, because the flares light showed all the parts of the room they hadn't seen. A most unwelcome sight met their eyes. Thousands of blood splat coated the walls, there wasn't anything in the room that wasn't overturned or smashed, and there were dead bodies everywhere. Some simply dead, some completely torn apart or mutilated, some wit limbs torn right off and even some with acid wounds. To make the sight even worse, some looked like they'd been eaten, and they weren't just soldiers, there where civilians and scientists too. Men, women, and when Austin shone his lights on a small nearby pile, children.

"Goddess. It's horrible." Said Liara. She instantly looked away.

Wrex kept silent, but his face clearly had a look of disgust, and maybe sorrow on it. Austin meanwhile merely sighed. He'd seen this sort of thing many times so it didn't affect him as much as it might've done.

Just before he could try and comfort Liara however, the flair finally went out. Almost instantly, the whole room went dark again, and the noises returned. This time though, it was even louder, there were even more footsteps than before, and the screams returned. Within seconds the walls began to move again. This time they moved even more, almost if the walls had come to life.

"They're coming back. And it sounds like they've brought friends." Said Wrex.
"Light another flair! We need to get out of this room." Said Liara.

Austin didn't need to be told twice. His left hand instantly went for his belt. He reached for another flair but couldn't seem to feel one. Starting to worry, he looked down at the pouch where he usually kept the flairs. To his horror, there weren't any more.

"Oh no."

The noises were now even closer. Austin desperately kept fumbling at the pouch, hoping to find another flair, but it was completely empty.

"Crap! That's all I had!" he said.

Wrex and Liara froze in shock. Not just because of what Austin had just said, but also because they could now see what Liara had seen earlier. True enough, Liara had been right about their size. The where very big, in fact they were roughly the size of his arm. Austin shone his light down at the ground, what he saw turned his skin white. In the light, he could see loads of tiny green aphid like creatures crawling towards them very slowly. He tried to scare them off with the flashlights but it didn't work. The flashlights weren't anywhere near as bright as the flair and the whole of Peak 15 has similarly dark lighting. These creatures where obviously used to that sort of light. True to what Liara had said, some of them where covered in blood, and it wasn't their own blood, it was human blood. That clearly gave the message that these things weren't friendly. The dead bodies though still didn't make sense. Even in their vast numbers, these workers didn't look as though they were capable of this much damage. Another scream rang in the groups ears, but it hadn't come from the workers. Austin shone his flashlight up, what he saw next would haunt him forever.

Bringing up the rear of the workers where massive spider like insects. They seemed to move slower than the workers but they were massive, almost as tall as Wrex. They were like visions from a nightmare—disgusting combinations, like a centipede mixed with a scorpion crossed with a crab. They walked on four spider like legs. In addition to this, they had two small human like arms with claws and two long, thin tentacles ending in little pods. Their faces and mouths seemed to like the face of a cockroach. Like the workers, they too where bathed in still fresh human blood. In all his life, Austin had never seen a scarier sight.

The workers seemed to slow down a bit and let the larger soldiers get ahead. Clearly the creatures where being cautious. Compared to the humans they had just been feasting on, Austin, Liara and Wrex where a prey they'd never seen before. One of the pods of soldier's got dangerously close to Wrex's face. Unable to take it anymore, Wrex punched it away. The soldier that the pod belonged to recoiled slightly, more pods then edged closer to Wrex but he simply punched them away as well. Then one of the workers suddenly jumped onto his face. Wrex struggled desperately to fling it off, he even screamed in fright as the bug started to bite and claw at his already scared face.

"Get it off! Get it off!" he screamed.

Austin and Liara ran over to try and help the Krogan. The rest of the creatures took this as a signal to advance and slowly began to march towards the group. Both Austin and Liara grabbed at the green worker and tried to pull it off of Wrex as its pincers tried to bite into the Krogan's super hard crest. Eventually, it let go, but then it started to crawl all over Liara, who had yanked it off of Wrex. She struggled desperately to shake it off as the worker crawled all over her body and tried to bite into her armour. Wrex, who was now free again, went berserk. He grabbed his shotgun back up from the floor and started swinging it like a club at the soldiers, each time hitting them. More of the workers jumped onto him but he was prepared for them now, plus they all missed his face. He simply grabbed them and threw them off of him. Any others, he managed to stomp on with his massive feet. Blood, limbs and actual pieces of the insects splattered all other him.
Seeing Liara in danger and hearing her struggles, Austin rushed over to Liara and tried to help her get the worker off. More of the green aphids jumped onto the Asari to join their friend and crawled all over her.

"Get'em off me! Austin, help me!" she screamed.

Austin grabbed several of the workers and flung them off. Like Wrex, he too used the butt of his assault rifle as a club and smashed several others off of the Asari. Not wanting to waste ammunition, he holstered the gun and drew Excalibur from his back.

"Hold still, Liara!" he said as he sliced several other workers off his girlfriend.

Eventually he managed to cut the last one of. Liara instantly picked up her own rifle and began hitting several of the workers with it. She also used her biotics to send a lot of them flying. It was easy for her to use them now that she could actually see the bugs. Austin meanwhile hacked and sliced away at the soldiers with his sword. The two made sure to stay close to one another since they both had their advantages and disadvantages. Liara was better at dealing with the workers since her biotics singled them out very well, however she wasn't as well equipped to fight the big ones. Austin on the other hand was able to deal with large soldiers by cutting off their tentacles and stabbing them with his sword. Plus his armour was much stronger, so he could handle the damage. Wrex on the other hand was able to handle both versions. His strength, body mass, hardened skin and redundant nervous system gave him all the advantages there.

Austin continued cutting violently at the soldiers. One managed to latch its mouth onto his leg but he quickly decapitated it. Wrex meanwhile had gone completely blood rage. In these sort of circumstances though, that was okay. He pulverised any of the bugs that crossed his path. He was like a madman. More of the workers managed to get past Liara's biotics again and another managed to knock Excalibur out of Austin's hand. Without his sword to help Liara, Austin unholstered his SMG. He hesitated to fire though. The last thing he wanted was to accidently shoot Liara.

"Kill them!" Liara cried.

"Stay still! Stop moving!" Austin yelled.

"I am! Get it off my face!" Liar yelled back as she tried to hold one of the workers away from her helmet.

Austin fired and managed to shoot away all the workers. He quickly noticed his sword lying at Liara's feet and took it up again in his hand. He began slicing again and at the same time shooting several of the workers and soldiers. Liara meanwhile lost her patience and began throwing all the biotic powers she had at them. Wrex was having the time of his life. Worker after worker and soldier after soldier fell dead as he continued smashing them all to pieces.

Austin was beginning to notice that some of the soldiers where holding back. They looked as though they were having second thoughts.

"Drive them back! Show them we're no easy prey!" Austin ordered.

As the three continued slicing, shooting and punching they kept advancing, forcing the insects to keep backing away. Eventually, several of the soldiers screamed a retreat scream and they disappeared into the vents. The workers then quickly followed.

Austin, Liara and Wrex took a few long moments to recover. They were completely out of breath and where still recover from the initial shock. But they were alive at least, and they had managed to
drive those creatures back.

"What in the name of Athame where those thing?" said Liara as she slowly got her breath back.

"Hell if I know. But they put up one hell of a fight." Said Wrex as he too took a moment to recover.

Austin walked up to one of the dead insect bodies and scanned it with his omni tool. The results made him even paler than he already was.

"No. That's impossible." He said as he scanned again.

"What is it?" Liara asked.

"I don't how this is possible… but it keeps saying that their Rachni." Austin replied.

"What? That's a load of crap, Shepard. The Rachni are extinct and I should know. Millions of my ancestors died to make that happen." Said Wrex.

"I know that, Wrex. Personally I don't think that's possible either but my suit keeps saying that their Rachni. The DNA is an exact match to Rachni samples collected back when they used to exist." Said Austin.

"What the hell is going on in this place?" Wrex asked rhetorically.

"I don't know. But we're gonna find out." Said Austin.

After a long time of wondering through more dark tunnels, they finally found themselves in a lit area. They had found the generator room at last. The lights where still very dim but it was bright enough now for them to see so they turned off their flashlights. Austin did the same for the ones on his helmet.

"Okay. Let's get this place back up." He said.

As the group entered the room however, another one of the creatures they had just fought earlier, along with several other workers burst out of the floor. Immediately though, the group opened fire on the insects. The soldier fell dead and the workers seemed to explode.

With the way clear, they made their way to a central chamber. Austin was certain this was where the VI user interface was. Inside the small cylinder that was in the chamber there was a small elevator. It led down into the VI's core.

"Stay here, you two. Watch the entrance, just in case." He ordered.

Wrex and Liara nodded while Austin descended into the core. After several long minutes Austin managed to fix the core and the elevator came back up. The facilities' VI, Mira came online.

"It looks like you're trying to restore this facility. Would you like help?" she asked.

"Help would be greatly appreciated. You're the VI that runs this place?" Austin checked. He just wanted to be sure.

"This system is monitored to respond to the name "Mira." May I ask your name?" Mira asked.

"Commander Austin Shepard. I'm with the Helldivers." Austin replied.
"One moment, please." Said Mira. There was a brief pause. "Service record confirmed. Due to the current emergency, you are entitled to Secure Access of all systems. Please note that queries relating to corporate secrets require Privileged access. Privileged Access is only available to Binary Helix executives." She finally said.

"I need to find Matriarch Benezia." Said Austin. Despite the sudden appearance of the Rachni, they still had a mission to do.

"Lady Benezia departed on the passageway tramway to the Rift station subsidiary labs." Mira replied. "User alert! The tramway system is currently inoperative."

"What's the damage then?" Austin inquired.

"Main reactor has been shut down in accordance with emergency containment procedures. Manual restart is required."

"I wish we'd brought Tali with us." Said Austin.

After managing to get the reactor back online with a lot of work, the group headed for the tram station that would take them to Rift station. Getting there involved having to go through the decontamination. They were at least thankful for this since now they could wash all the blood and goo of the Rachni off of their armour.

Once the decontamination had completed though, they opened the next door only to find themselves facing at least three Rachni soldiers. It was nothing they couldn't handle though. Just before the last one died though it spat something out of its mouth which narrowly missed Austin's helmet and hit the wall instead. Upon impact the wall began to bubble, melt and slowly dissolve.

"Great. As though this day couldn't get any worse. These things spit acid." Said Austin annoyingly. "Keep your distance from the big ones."

The tram ride was brief and they quickly arrived at Rift station. Unlike Peak 15, it didn't look as though this place had been attacked by the Rachni. There no bodies or signs of damage. Once again though it was way too quiet. As the exited the tram room they came across two doors. The one on the left said "Hot Labs." While the other appeared to be an elevator. Since the hot labs door was currently locked down they took the elevator. What surprised them though was when they exited they found themselves facing several human guards.

"Finally! Civilisation." Austin thought.

"Stand down." Said the leader.

The other guards stood down. But they still seemed to keep an eye on the group.

"Sorry. We couldn't be sure what was on the tram." The Captain apologised to Austin. "You're human and that's enough that I won't shoot. But I'd like to know who you are."

"Commander Shepard. I'm a Helldiver." Austin replied.

"Huh. I won't look a heavily-armed horse in the mouth." Said the Captain. "Those creatures overran the hot labs last week. Only Han Olar got out, and he ain't all there anymore. The first we knew, the creatures were clawing into my command post. We had a lot more staff then." Said the Captain.

"We're packing fire and steel. They want to fight with claws and teeth, it's their funeral." Said
"You got my support. The board sent an Asari to clean up the mess. She went to the hot labs yesterday. We haven't heard from her since." Said the Captain.

"Benezia. Do you know if she's still over there?" Austin asked.

"I don't know. I don't see what one person could do." Said the Captain.

"A Matriarch has the skill to keep herself alive for a long time." Said Liara.

"There's an emergency elevator out by the trams. This card will let you activate it. It can take you down to the hot labs." Said the Captain as he handed a card to Austin. The Helldiver took it and scanned it into his omni tool.

"Sounds like we've got work to do then." He said.

"Yeah, I hear th-" but the captain was interrupted by the sound of a loud rumble and the scream of a Rachni soldier. "Hell! Man the perimeter!" he ordered.

Almost immediately, all the Guards, Austin, Liara and Wrex whirled around, guns at the ready.

As if on cue, two Rachni soldiers burst out of the floor. Everyone immediately opened fire on them. The first Rachni spat acid which hit two of the guards. Austin quickly counteracted with a Frag grenade. Both the Rachni warriors were obliterated by the explosion.

"Thanks for the help. Every few hours, a group comes up the tram tunnel. It's actually better since we locked down the elevator." Said the Captain.

"We'll do whatever we can." Said Austin.

"I don't know why they keep throwing themselves against our defences. Even animals should learn not to stick their noses where it hurts." Said the Captain.

The room past the guards led into a large chamber which had a lot of survivors. They were surprised by the appearance of the Helldiver but they seemed happy to see a friendly face. They were all nervous about the whole situation with the Rachni. There were a lot of wounded survivors being tended to by doctors and scientists. Some of their injuries were quite extreme. Most of them just had acid injuries, but a few of the injuries were more extreme.

Pretty soon, the group found an unoccupied door. There seemed to be nothing but snow back there. Austin had made several inquiries about Benezia to the survivors. One of them had let slip on the Matriarchs location and had given directions. Within a few minutes, the group had the snow cleared. There were more Rachni in the tunnels but that didn't stop them. Soon they were in the more sealed off areas of Rift station. They turned a corner and opened a nearby door. Sure enough, standing right in front of them at the top of the stairs and looking at a massive containment cell, was Matriarch Benezia.

"Goddess. It's actually her." Said Liara.

Benezia took notice of the group. She didn't look surprised or shocked to see them. It was obvious that she'd been expecting them.
"You do not know the privilege of being a mother. There is power in creation. To shape a life. Turn it toward happiness or despair." She said. She then looked back at the containment cell. It looked as though there was something inside there. Something massive. "Her children were to be ours. Raised to hunt and slay Saren's enemies." She said.

The Matriarch then turned to face the group. Austin was quite surprised by old Benezia really did look. He had met a few Matriarchs before, but none of them had ever looked this old. Unfortunately, the most distracting and annoying part of the Matriarch was that the black dress she wore exposed an awful lot of her large cleavage.

"Something I see she passed on to Liara." Austin thought in his mind. "No! Focus you idiot! Stop staring at her breasts!" He told himself.

"I won't be moved by sympathy. No matter who you bring into this confrontation." Said Benezia. Austin knew full well who she was referring to.

"Liara's here because she wants to be. Not because I asked her to. She's the mistress of her fate. Not me." Austin said defensively.

"Indeed? What have you told him about me, Liara?" Benezia asked her daughter directly.

"What could I say, mother? That you're insane? Evil? Should I explain how to kill you? What could I say?" Liara replied desperately. From the tone of her voice, Austin could tell she was trying to hold together.

"Have you faced an Asari commando unit before? Few humans have." Benezia threatened.

"As a matter of fact I have. But you're willing to kill your own daughter? I don't believe that." Said Austin. He could tell this wasn't going to end well.

"I now realize I should've been stricter with her." Said Benezia. With that, that she activated her biotics. For a moment, Austin was frozen. He couldn't move.

"I really wish biotics wouldn't do that. That's cheating!" he thought.

A door at the far end of the room suddenly opened. Two Asari commandos came out to assist the matriarch.

"Deal with the Helldiver and the Krogan. I want my daughter unharmed." Benezia ordered.

As the Matriarch turned her back on the group, Austin found that he could move again. He and the other immediately dove for cover and fired on the Commandos. Austin however picked a rather exposed spot and was fired upon. Fortunately, his shields took the most damage. Wrex distracted the Commandoes by bolting out of cover, relying on his own shielding to keep him safe. Needless to say, one of the Commandos did not take all that long to take down with the superior firepower of weapons.

Benezia and the Commandos where throwing biotics attacks at them throughout the battle, which resulted in Austin being thrown into a stack of crates and then sending him and Wrex flying around the battlefield like a large projectile, and other unpleasant effects. Though one good thing came out of it. When Wrex used his own biotics to counter the effect somewhat he took down the last Commando by hitting her over the head a little too hard, knocking her out.

Benezia then used stasis on the whole crew again, then called in a wave of Geth. They however
didn't prove much of a challenge and were mown down like wheat by the powerful rounds from all three of the team.

The group assembled before Benezia's platform, which had extended toward the tank holding the creature. Austin held his pistol up just in case. He was really hoping that he wouldn't have to use it though.

"Listen, Benezia. I don't want to kill you. Surrender now and you will not be harmed." He said.

"Please, mother! Listen to him!" Liara begged.

"This… is not over, Saren is unstoppable…" Benezia said, standing despite her wounds. "My mind is filled with his light!" She turned back toward the tank where the creature rested "Everything is clear…"

"It doesn't have to be this way, Benezia, tell us, what's Saren's next move?"

"I will not betray him, you will… you…" Austin had the distinct impression that something was up and that if he was going to use his weapon he'd better do it soon.

"You must listen, Saren still whispers in my mind, I can fight his compulsions briefly, but the indoctrination is strong…" said Benezia.

Shepard understood now what had happened "We met Shiala on Feros, she told us about Sovereign's indoctrination."

"It is a terror to be trapped in your mind, to beat upon the glass as your hands torture and murder… I was powerless, nothing but a tool for Saren. He sent me here to find the location of the Mu Relay; its position was lost thousands of years ago."

Austin raised an eyebrow. "How does something that big go missing?" he asked.

"Four thousand years ago a star nearby went supernova, the shockwave propelled the Relay out of its system, but did not damage it, its precise vector and speed were impossible to determine, as millennia passed, the nebula created by the supernova enveloped the Relay." She paused "It is difficult to find any cold object in interstellar space, particularly something swathed in hot dust and radiation."

Austin didn't quite get the point of this information "So someone on Noveria found it?"

"The Rachni once inhabited that region of the galaxy, they discovered the relay, the Rachni can share their memories across generations, Queens inherit the knowledge of their mothers." Austin stiffened, so this was where all the Rachni were coming from, this queen… The creature in the tank…

"I took the location of the Relay from the Queen's mind… I was not gentle." Benezia coughed.

Austin could tell now that the Matriarch was dying.

"You can still make it right, Benezia. Give me the information." He said calmly.

"I was not myself… but I should have been stronger." Said Benezia. She walked toward them, holding a disk in her hand "I transcribed the data to an OSD, take it, please!" Austin did as she asked and took the disk "There isn't much time… I transmitted the coordinates to Saren before you arrived. You have to stop me, I… can't, his teeth are at my ear!" the Matriarch's voice was growing
desperate. "Fingers at my spine!" She seemed to be almost clawing at her headdress, bent over in pain before the console she'd moved back toward "you should…"

Liara finally unfroze and moved forward. "Mother! Don't leave! Fight him!" she cried.

Benezia turned toward her daughter one last time. "You've always made me proud, Liara." Then she tensed and shuddered for a moment before her control failed and her biotics flared higher than any Shepard had yet seen "DIE!"

Before she could do anything though, Liara took out her own pistol and shot Benezia in the heart.

The Matriarch slumped against the wall. "I cannot go on." She spluttered. Blood was beginning to bleed from her chest and her mouth. "You will have to stop him, Shepard."

"Hold on! We have medi-gel!" said Austin as he knelt down in front of Benezia.

"No! He is still in my mind! I am not in complete control! I never will be." Benezia refused as she still clutched her wound.

"Mother." Liara cried as she knelt down as well, almost on the verge of tears.

"Come closer, Liara." Benezia urged.

Liara did so. Benezia stretched out her un-bloodied hand and stroked her daughter's cheek.

"So beautiful. I always wanted you to be like this." She said.

Liara put her own hand and Benezia's an let a tear fall from her eye. "I'm so sorry, mother." She said.

Austin put his hand on her shoulder.

"Shepard. Promise me that you will protect her. Saren may still want her. I cannot bear the thought of him taking her." Benezia pleaded to him.

"You have my word, Benezia. As long as I live and breathe, I'll never let that bastard have her!" Austin promised.

Liara smiled to Austin. The Matriarch noticed this.

"You love him, don't you?" she asked.

Liara saw no point in hiding what was clear to her mother's eye. "Yes, I do. More than anything."

"Does he know?" she asked.

"Yes. I love Liara as well. I'll never let anything happen to her." Said Austin. Even he was a bit saddened by Benezia's passing.

"I'm happy for you, little wing. I've read a lot about Shepard. He is most wonderful man. You deserve him." Benezia said to Liara.

Liara smiled and hugged her mother. Benezia returned the hug.

"I love you, mother." Liara cried.

"I love you too, Liara. And I always will." Benezia coughed.
"Shepard. There is something I must tell you. In private." Said Benezia.

Austin merely nodded and removed his helmet. He then edged closer to Benezia. The Matriarch then whispered something into his ear.

"Goodnight, little wing." She then said out loud to Liara. She looked up slightly and seemed to smile.

Benezia then drew her last breath and passed away. Austin bowed his head and closed the Matriarchs eyes.

"I'm sorry." He whispered.

"Mother." Liara sobbed.

Austin put his arm around her shoulder and hugged her tightly.

"Why? Why didn't you help her?" Liara shouted at him.

"You heard what she said, Liara." Austin said. He didn't try to retaliate or argue with her. He didn't blame her for being upset or trying to blame him. She'd calm down eventually. But it was still a bit painful to have to endure her being angry at him.

"That still doesn't mean you couldn't have tried!" Liara sobbed angrily as she pushed him away.

"Give it time, Austin. She'll come round." Austin said to himself.

He left Liara alone to grieve for her mother. Wrex walked up to him.

"Will she be okay?" he asked. Surprisingly, he did actually sound as if he cared.

"She just needs time." Austin replied. He tried his best not to let his own sadness show. Seeing his love in pain was more painful than anything he'd endured. He now understood why some Helldivers where so cold about love and intimacy. But that didn't change anything. He loved Liara and nothing would ever change that. All he could do now was just wait until she returned to normal. He knew at least that she wasn't truly blaming him for her mother's death. She was only trying to let off steam. He would probably have done the same thing. Though he might've controlled his temper better than her.

Austin walked closer to the tank that was holding the Rachni queen. He really hadn't expected the queen to be that big.

Unknown to the whole group, one of the dead Asari Commandos was getting back up. She limped towards the Helldiver.

Suddenly the Queen seemed to roar right at Austin, causing him to repel back in shock. He bumped into the Asari as he did. He immediately drew his sword on her but froze when he saw that she wasn't trying to attack him. The asari then slowly turned to face the group and opened her eyes. Despite what was happening, there was no life in them.

"This one serves as our voice." Said the Asari. The voice was strange. It sounded old and calm and at the same time, it seemed to have loads of whispers about it. "We cannot sing. Not in these low spaces. Your music's are…colourless."

"Music's? What do you mean?" Austin asked.
"You're way of communicating is strange. Flat. It does not colour the air. When we speak, one moves all. We are the… mother. We sing for those left behind. The children you thought silenced. We are Rachni." Said the Asari.

"Actual, living Rachni? I don't know what to say." Liara sniffed as she began to recover from her crying.

"How are you speaking through her? This Asari." Austin asked. He edged closer to the Asari and examined her. She wasn't blinking at all, nor was she taking any notice of the Helldiver in front of her. She also didn't appear to be breathing either.

"Our kind sing through touching's of thought. We pluck the springs, and the other understands. She is weak to urging. She has colours we have no names for. But she is ending. Her music is bittersweet. It is beautiful." Said the Asari.

Austin stood back from the Asari.

"You are not in harmony with those who seek to control us. What will you sing? Will you release us? Are we to fade away once more?" the Queen asked.

"There are acid tanks rigged up on that thing. Set them off. Millions of my ancestors died to put these things down. Don't let them come back!" said Wrex.

"They made a mistake. They let the Krogan go too far. This is a chance for us to atone. She has done nothing to us." Liara objected.

"Your companions hear the truth." Said the Queen. "You have the power to free us, or return our people to the silence of memory."

"How did you survive the war? Are you a clone or something?" Austin asked. He felt she should at least ask. He had already made up his mind.

"We do not know. We were only an egg hearing mother cry in our dreams. Then we awoke in this place. The last echo of those who came out from the singing planet. The sky is silent." The Queen replied.

"I won't destroy an entire race. Not even yours. I've seen too much genocide in my time and I won't add to it. You're free to go." Austin said calmly.

"Are you stupid, Shepard? You're people didn't fight these bastards, so maybe you don't get it!" Wrex objected.

"You've been blinded by old war stories, Wrex. If you don't like my decision you're gonna have to shoot me. I can understand how you might feel, but I won't commit genocide. That's not what Helldivers do. We're not all as soulless as some people think!" Austin said defensively.

"Do what you want. But my people will clean up this mess later, just like we did for the Salarians." Wrex grumbled.

"You will give us the chance to compose anew?" The Queen asked surprisingly.

"Yes. Yes, I will. Teach your children well." Said Austin as he smiled behind his helmet. There was something about this choice that made him feel a bit better now.

"We will forever remember you, mighty worrier. We will forever sing of your forgiveness to our
children.” Said the Queen gratifyingly.

"Great. Bugs are writing songs about you. Mark my words, you'll regret this.” Said Wrex.

"We'll see about that." Said Austin as he walked over to the tanks control panel.

"Before you release us, we must ask your favour. The children we birthed, where stolen from us before they could learn to sing. They are lost to the silence. End their suffering. They cannot be saved. They will only cause harm as they are.” Said the Queen.

"If you're sure they can't be saved…” Austin checked. He wanted to be sure that this was what the Queen wanted.

"It is lamentable, but necessary. Do what you must, great warrior.” Said the Queen.

"As you wish.” Austin said as he bowed his head the Queen. He walked over to the control panel and activated the release switch. The tank rose up to join a network of tunnels and the hatch opened.

"Before we leave… What is your name, great warrior?” the Queen asked.

"My name is Commander Austin Shepard of the Helldivers.” Austin answered proudly.

"You will forever be remembered in or songs as, Shepard, the Great Helldiver Warrior.” Said the Queen. "We are certain that we will meet you again. Thank you, Shepard.” Said the Queen.

The Asari that the Queen had been controlling went limp and finally died. From inside the tank, the Queen bowed its head to Austin and then vanished into the tunnels.

"Let's get out of here.” Said Wrex.

"What about my mother?” Liara asked.

"I'll carry her body for you.” Said Austin.

"Thank you… Shepard.” Liara said. She had clearly hesitated at using his first name that time. It worried Austin slightly but he pushed the thought aside. This would be something that they would sort out back on the Normandy.

He gently picked up Benezia's body in his arms and slowly carried her out of the room and back up to the tram. Before they left, he placed her body inside the tram and left it there so that they could head back down to deal with the last Rachni remnants.

As they exited the elevator the found that the tunnel led to a large open room. There was a lone scientist sat on a chair in the middle of the room.

"Are you here to secure the situation?” he asked.

"That's right. I'm a Helldiver.” Austin replied. "Who are you?"

"I am Yaroslev Tartakovskiy, the operations director. I would stand and shake hand but er…” He seemed nervous. "You must listen to me. If we do not contain our mistake, they will drop bombs from the battle stations. Do you understand?”

"Wait… Are you saying you let them loose?” Austin asked.
"Binary Helix found an egg. It was on a derelict ship. Thousands of years drifting. This was Rachni ship; inside they find many eggs in cryogenic suspension." Yaroslev replied.

"An egg thousands of years old just hatched?" Austin asked, a bit surprised. Could the Queen really be that old?

"Yes. Very tough to be so long frozen that it survived the centuries. This is miraculous. Binary Helix planned to clone Rachni. Mass produce them. Create an army. But when they get here, they find this egg is not a common Rachni. It is a queen. After she lays eggs, they move her to rift station. They're thinking that without her, they can raise the babies to be obedient." Said Yaroslev.

"Trust me. Separating them from their mother didn't work." Said Austin.

"Indeed. This was exactly the wrong thing to do. I am thinking without a Queen, Rachni do not develop properly. Her mind is shaping theirs. These Rachni are uncontrollable." Yaroslev agreed.

"How do we deal with them then?" Austin asked.

"We must activate the Neutron Purge. Arming controls are nearby. All you do is insert a key. Then I will give Mira the..." but Yaroslev was interrupted as a Rachni pod burst through his chest. It threw him aside and lunged at them. With lightning fast reactions, Austin unsheathed Excalibur and sliced the Rachni in half. Tones of blood splattered onto him. He groaned at the fact that he'd have to clean his armour again.

"Just no end to these things, is there?" Wrex said sarcastically.

"That's the thing about cockroaches. No matter how many times you flush them down the toilet, they always crawl back up the bowel." Austin joked.

Austin went over to Yaroslev's lifeless body and took the code from him. The group then proceeded into the next room and activated Mira's terminal.

"Connecting. I now have full access to the facility and am at your disposal." Said Mira as her orange hologram came online.

"Activate the Neutron purge." Said Austin.

"I'm sorry, but I can't do that without proper code authorisation." Said Mira.

"Code input: 8, 7, 5, 0, 2, 0, 0, 7, 9. Code omega local execution." Said Austin.


As soon as the VI deactivated, the whole place came alive with Rachni screams. Austin, Liara and Wrex immediately made a break for the elevator. They rushed past all the Rachni that tried to claw at them and barely managed to make it. The elevator stopped and the group proceed back into the tram, with Benezia's body still inside.

"Let's go home." Said Austin.

There you have it. If any of you are worried about the relationship between Liara and Shepard being strained, do not worry, they'll make up in the next chapter. In fact I can't really help myself. So fair warning that next chapter will be another sex one, then we can move to Virmire.
For anyone who might not have noticed, the fight scene between the team and the army of Rachni is actually based off the insect battle in the 2005 remake of King Kong. I used that for inspiration.

I hope you liked this chapter. Please do leave reviews for this one. I really want to know your opinions on this one.
Chapter 17, Where do we stand?

Be warned that this chapter contains sex.

This is the last bit before Virmire.

Chapter 17

Where do we stand?

Having returned back to the Normandy, the team had once again assembled back in the comm room to go over the mission.

"What's our next move, Commander? Head for the Mu Relay?" Ashley asked.

"No. The Mu Relay links to dozens of systems. Unless we know exactly where Saren's going we'd just be wasting our time." Austin answered.

"The Commander is right. We cannot rush off blind. We still need to learn more about Saren." Said Liara.

Austin was still worried about her. She'd been very quiet ever since they'd left Noveria. Benezia's body had been cleaned up and Austin had put her body in a stasis coffin so it wouldn't decompose before a proper funeral.

"Exactly. I'm beginning to think that that's what the Prothean visions are for. If we can find the missing information that Saren has, maybe then we'll know where he's heading. But for now we don't have any more leads. Until then everyone has earned some rest. It's been one hell of a tough mission." Said Austin.

The crew disbanded. Austin wanted to follow Liara but Joker's voice stopped him.

"Noveria report is away, Commander. You want me to patch you through to the Council?" he asked.

Austin knew that this time wouldn't go well at all. The Council would no doubt be angry at him for cutting them off again, and they'd lecture him on his choice to free the Queen.

"Don't bother this time, Joker. I've had a tough enough day as it is. I don't want the Council to make it worse." He said.

"Yes sir." Said Joker.

Austin instantly headed for Liara's quarters. He knew she was probably still grieving for Benezia and he had to know where their relationship stood. He couldn't bear the thought of her ending his love for her.

As he proceeded through the Med bay and into Liara's room however, it was empty. He then saw a small note on the table. He picked it up and read it.

"Austin. We need to talk in private. I'm in your quarters. Come and meet me there. Liara." Said the note. There were also three kisses under her name.
Austin's face lit up ever so slightly. Perhaps he'd been wrong all this time. Without hesitating he left the med bay and headed into his quarters. Sure enough, Liara was in there. She was currently admiring his Helldiver armour which had been reassembled in the room and was now on display. She quickly took notice of him. She walked up to him.

"Austin… If you wish to talk about my mother's death, you need not bother. She brought it on herself." She said.

"Don't pretend it doesn't bother you. She was your mother." Said Austin.

Liara then hugged him tightly. She didn't seem to cry but Austin still hugged her back tightly nonetheless.

"She was… but at the same time she was not. I prefer to remember Benezia as she used to be, before she was corrupted by Sovereign's power." Said Liara.

"The best of your mother lives on in you; her determination, her intelligence, her strength." Said Austin. He had considered mentioning some of the more sexy function, but he resisted the urge. He still didn't know where their relationship stood.

"Your too kind, Austin. I appreciate your concern, but I am fine now. Benezia chose her path, just as I have chosen mine. I will never leave you, my love. I will fight at your side until the end." Said Liara.

"So, where do we stand? We're good?" Austin asked. From what Liara had said, it sounded as though their relationship was fine. But he had to be sure.

"Of course we are. Even my mother's death wouldn't make me love you any less. I love you, Austin. And nothing in my life is ever going to change that." Said Liara as she stroked his face.

"Good. I was getting worried for a minute." Said Austin as he breathed a sigh of relief.

"I feel I should apologize for making you worried about us. I am very sorry for what I said back on Noveria. But I was just so angry and full of sorrow. I had to let it out." Said Liara.

"It's alright, love. You have nothing to apologise for. We all try to blame others for the deaths of people we love. I know I have." Austin reassured her.

"But I still should've controlled my anger better. I shouldn't have let all my anger out on you. I shouldn't have cracked." Said Liara.

"If you don't crack sometimes, how do you know how far you can go?" Austin pointed out.

Liara considered that for a minute. He was right. Plus he was far more reassuring than anyone else she'd met in her life. She then smiled up at her boyfriend.

"Once again you keep proving that you share the wisdom of the Matriarchs, Austin." She said.

The two lovebirds smiled at one another and kissed.

"So what happens now?" Austin asked.

Liara's mouth then curled into a very seductive smile.

"I feel that a simple apology to you isn't enough, my love. I need to show how sorry I am in a more… physical way." She said as she placed her hands on his strong chest. She then winked at him.
and indicated towards the bed. Austin knew fully well what she meant.

"Liara. You don't need to have sex with me to prove how sorry you are. I've already forgiven you." Said Austin.

"I know that. But I need cheering up, and so do you. Come on, Austin. Don't tell me that you don't want to see me naked again and then fuck me nice and hard again. You haven't made love to me since our swimming date." Liara pleaded.

At the sight of her puppy do eyes, Austin couldn't resist.

"You are such a little minx, Liara. Come here!" he said.

Austin scooped Liara up in his arms and carried her over to the bed, arms entangled around each other, articles of clothing suddenly appearing on the floor; creating a path toward the bed.

"I've been a naughty little Asari." Said Liara.

"Indeed you have." Austin replied as he started to unzip Liara's science uniform.

Within minutes, both Austin and Liara where now in wearing nothing but their underwear.

"Hot!" Austin smirked as Liara pulled down his boxers, exposing his eager manhood.

"Not as hot as you, Austin." Said Liara as she started to stroke him. He hummed his approval as he unclasped her bra. The large breasts that her mother had passed down to her sprang free. Her nipples where already erect. Austin started to massage one of them with his thumb.

"I missed out something else of your mother that clearly lives on in you. She did have an amazing rack, but yours is way better." Austin said as he kissed her breasts.

"I was beginning to wonder if you'd bring up the fact that my mother's dress showed a lot cleavage." Liara chuckled.

Austin leant down and began sucking and biting furiously on her moist boobs. All the while Liara ruffled his hair with her free hand, her other still continued to gently squeeze and stroke his cock. She moaned and gasped loudly as he sucked her nipple. Austin sucked and spat and licked and chewed her beautiful boobs for a good 2 minutes before he felt a little more reinvigorated.

"Wanna move onwards?" he asked as he finally let her breast go with a little pop.

Liara nodded. "Take my panties off." She said.

Austin started to kiss his way down her body. Liara moaned in approval as Austin stopped briefly at her belly button and he planted a very heavy kiss there.

"Is it just me, or you getting a bit more muscular?" Austin asked.

"With all the combat we've been facing, I'd be surprised if my fitness hadn't increased. There's nothing wrong with that is there?" Liara asked slightly nervously.

"Not at all, Liara. You'd look even sexier like that." Said Austin. He then tried to see if his girlfriend was ticklish. To his delight, she was.

Liara giggled and laughed as she tried to stop her boyfriend.
"Stop it. That tickles." She giggled.

Austin smiled at her and finally stopped. He then resumed his slow kissing down her body until he reached her black panties.

"Take them off!" Liara ordered.

Austin decided to be very naughty. He took the top half of her panties in between his teeth and gently pulled them off.

"Oh, Austin! You are so naughty!" she moaned.

"Austin growled in agreement and finally yanked her panties fully off. Her dripping Azure came into view. Austin licked his lips as he saw them glisten from the dark lights in his quarters. Liara then spread her pussy lips with her hand to show him how wet she really was.

Austin smiled and slid two of his fingers inside the Asari's moistness. The mix of pain and pleasure caused Liara to cry out and she began to rock desperately against the Helldiver's fingers. The both of them found rhythm, Austin thrusting into Liara as she slammed down onto his fingers. As he thrust into her he then started to lick at her dripping Azure. She tasted even sweeter than Sha'ira had.

"You taste nice." He said.

"Oh goddess! Lick me there! I didn't even know you where into this sort of thing." Liara moaned.

In an instinctual decision, Austin added a third finger to his thrusting.

"Come for me, Liara." He said, his voice husky and rich with desire.

Austin then felt Liara's vaginal walls contract sharply around his fingers as Liara stopped in mid motion, her body shaking and writhing as the orgasm swept over her body. Austin held her there, not daring to move until she relaxed, which was a good minute or so after she initially came.

"Goddess! That was so good!" Liara panted. She then looked directly at Austin. A new lust in her eyes. "My turn!"

She then grabbed Austin and pulled him towards her until he was sitting on her chest. His cock rested between her tits. She squeezed both of them together and began to pump him hard. Austin quickly caught on and started to thrust in time with her as she grinded up and down his shaft.

"Jeez! What kind of research have you been doing?" he groaned.

"More than just standard human sex. You wouldn't believe what information Asari have on having sex with humans. Especially males." Said Liara as she continued to pump his cock with her tits.

"So soft." Austin moaned. "So warm."

Liara then began to lick at the head of his dick. She could already taste his pre cum. She then impressively took the whole of his shaft into her mouth. Her throat instinctively contracting in an attempt to swallow and digest his massive rod. She could sense he was close and so she let him pop out of her mouth.

"Are you about to unload?" she asked.

"Yep!" Austin groaned.
Liara pumped her boyfriend’s cock even more until he finally erupted. 3 Large spurts set out to coat her breasts and neck as his balls twitched and tightened. 2 more massive spurts then drenched her face. She licked them off. For a few seconds she savoured the taste.

"And you said that I taste good." Said Liara, quite surprised by how much he had just given her.

"Time for the grand finale, I think." Said Austin.

He lowered himself so that he was now lined up properly with Liara. She still stroked him to keep his cock from softening.

"Just before you fuck my brains out again, Austin. What did my mother whisper to you?" Liara asked.

Austin hesitated for a moment. He then took Liara’s still beautiful young face in his hands and kissed her.

"She said… Give my daughter a family. Make her the mother I should’ve been.” He said.

Liara was surprised by this.

"You mean? She wanted us to be married and have children?” she asked. "I don't know if we're ready for that. We haven't even had union yet."

"Don't worry, Liara. I agree with you. I wouldn't mind having babies with you one day. But I don't think we need to rush things. I think we should at least be married first before we try that. That is if you'd be willing to go that far in our relationship." Said Austin.

Liara smiled at him. "Of course I would. I love you, and one day I want to be your wife and bond mate. But we should at least stop Saren first. In the meantime though I think you should at least finish what you and I have started." She said as he indicated to his still hard beef stick.

Austin didn't need to be asked twice. He grabbed hold of her waist and pulled her forward, impaling her on his cock, he moved his hands to the underside of her knees and held there, as he thrust into her.

"Oh, yes! Get it in further!” Liara moaned as he pushed particularly deep into her, the man leaned forward and stared at her perky breasts for a moment, the nipples were a darker shade than the rest of her skin, much the same as humans, he kissed the valley between her bust, before taking one of her hard nipples into his mouth, biting and licking around it, teasing her areola with his skilled tongue. Liara grabbed tightly onto his back as she continued to scream his name loudly. She then flipped him over so that she was on top.

"Ahh!” Liara panted loudly, she was close already, the familiar tightening of her muscles increasing the pleasure for her partner, and thus for her. This was the point of no return, unless they both completely stomped their ministrations there was no way to prolong sex, orgasm was coming whether they liked it or not.

The sight of seeing her riding him drove Austin over the edge and he couldn't hold on any longer.

"Cum with me my love!” Liara screamed. She felt her vaginal walls clamp down hard on Austin, just before she heard him grunt unusually and felt his cock attempt to jerk inside of her. All of a sudden Austin shot his thick human cum deep into her, she gasped loudly at the sensation of feeling his warm cum painting her walls and womb. It hit them like a mass accelerated slug to the chest; Liara threw her bust out as her back arched uncontrollably, her pelvic muscles spasmed to the point of
pleasure turning into pain, every nerve in her body felt as if it was to explode as the orgasm rocked her.

She collapsed onto him, panting loudly, raggedly gasping for air, with cum still actively gushing into her.

"You never cease to amaze me." She breathed deeply, regaining her breath.

"I love you, Liara." Said Austin as he slowly felt himself begin to fall asleep.

"I love you too, Austin." Said Liara. She too felt herself beginning to drift off.

The two both kissed each other deeply just as sleep claimed them. Liara's head rested on her boyfriend's strong chest while he just managed to put his arm around her and hug her tightly to him. The two drifted off into a long pleasurable sleep.

"Commander, we've got a message from Admiral Hackett." Said Joker's voice.

"Commander. We've found something that we thought you'd be interested in. We recently found reports of a Geth outpost located somewhere on the planet Solcrum in the Grissom system." Came Hackett's voice.

"Just Geth units?" Austin asked.

"Yes. But it's highly possible that you could find some more information on Saren in the databanks that they have." Said Hackett.

"I'll set a course wright away, Admiral." Said Austin.

"Good luck, Commander. Hackett out."

Solcrum was certainly what Austin would call a very lonely and dark planet. On the plus side though, it had a most spectacular view of the massive gas giant Notanban. For tackling the Geth, Tali was Austin's first choice without hesitation for the mission. He then decided to just go with Liara as well.

The entrance to the Geth base wasn’t guarded so they were able to take the drop ship for this mission. When the Hellhound touched down however, Austin got the feeling that it probably meant that they’d find all the Geth inside. That would make their job a lot harder.

The whole interior of the base was designed completely different to any other that Austin had seen. Austin could already detect the Geth inside the room.

"Ready everyone?" he asked.

Both his companions nodded. They took up their positions for the door breach maneuver and Austin readied the detonator. Tali had her omni tool ready for disabling the Geth's shields and Liara charged up her biotics.

"Placing detonator." Said Austin as he placed the detonator on the door and armed it. "Clear!"

All three of the team turned their heads away from the explosion. The detonator exploded and the door opened. Tali threw an EMP grenade through the door way and allowed it detonate. Three of the Geth where caught in the blast. The team filed into the room and opened fire on the Geth.
Two Geth Juggernauts entered the fray with a new host of Troopers, opening fire with their rockets, which impacted solidly on the team's shields. Liara's biotic field shattered with the second strike and most of the destructive energies expended themselves against Tali's personal shields, their original target. Austin however threw a stun grenade at the Juggernauts, causing them to slow down considerably while the troopers went to cover. Tali and Liara hit the Juggernauts with everything they had. Austin meanwhile, chased a lone Geth soldier up to the higher levels. The soldier took cover behind several large crates and laid down suppressing fire on the Helldiver, forcing him to take cover behind a nearby box.

The soldier then seemed to stop firing and then disappeared behind the crates. Austin then heard the sound of heavy machinery and something massive powering up.

"What are you playing at?" Austin asked as he looked out of cover.

Out from the behind the boxes, a massive Geth spider with a cannon on its back walked out from behind the boxes. The soldier was at the controls. Austin's eyes widened in surprise.

"That's not fair!" he said. He instantly ran out of cover and bolted for the balcony.

The cannon fired a massive nuke but it barely missed Austin as he jumped over the edge. The whole upper balcony exploded. Austin's suit would've absorbed the fall for him, but fortunately, it didn't need to. He landed on two Geth soldiers and the sheer weight of his armour, coupled with the force of gravity pulling him to the ground, crushed them.

The spider cannon peaked over the edge and prepared to fire again. But this time, Austin was ready for it.

"Liara!" he yelled.

Liara immediately looked in the direction of her name. Seeing the massive cannon, she immediately used her biotics to pull the whole of the upper floor that it was stood on. Without proper footing, the cannon fell to the ground with a loud crash followed by a massive explosion sending dust and debris flying everywhere. In the process it also took both the Geth Juggernauts and some more of the troopers with it.

Once the last Geth fell to the ground motionless, silence descended upon the field.

"Well… Looks like the Geth have had a smashing time." Austin joked, slightly out of breath from the explosion.

Both Liara and Tali laughed at this.

"That sense of humour of yours is gonna get you anywhere." Liara laughed.

"Even…" Austin asked suggestively as he used his head to indicate to Liara's lower regions.

Liara smiled from behind her helmet. Her boyfriend was such a flirter.

"If I recall, it already has." She said.

As the team began searching for anything useful, Austin came across a terminal. He found something very, very interesting…

"Tali… you'd better come take a look at this." He said
"Something to decrypt?" The slightly synthesized quality of Tali's voice was particularly prominent in the confined space.

"We've got a console filled with Geth data over here; can you make two copies of it?" the Helldiver asked.

"Remember who you're talking to." Tali said happily. If Austin could've seen Tali's face he would've certain she was smiling. After a few moments of keying away at the console though, it turned from happiness to amazement.

"Shepard. Look at this. All the files from this console have information that explains how the Geth have evolved over the years ever since the drove my people from our home world." Said Tali. "I know that you'll probably want to upload this data to your superiors, but I want a copy of it as well." She said.

"You want to bring it back to the fleet, don't you?" Austin asked.

"These files have information that could be vital to our efforts to understand the Geth. It could even be the key to reclaiming Rannoch." Said Tali.

"Hold on though. If we give this to you, then you'll leave us. We won't have as much of an advantage against Saren without you." Said Austin. He'd hate to lose such a valuable member of his team.

"I won't leave you right away, Shepard. I'll stay with you as long as it takes to stop Saren. But my people need this!" said Tali.

"You sure though, Tali. The data's heavily encrypted. Even the best information Brokers in the galaxy could take years to decipher and analyse it." Said Austin.

"Maybe even decades. But it'll be worth the wait." Said Tali.

"Go ahead then, Tali. I already need two copies of the data to send to the Arkanes and the Alliance. They'll benefit from this as much as you. Make a private third copy for yourself." Said Austin.

To his surprise, the young Quarian threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly.

"My people—I—owe you a great debt. One I can never repay. All I can offer is my sworn word that I will remain part of your crew until the end." Said Tali happily.

"I couldn't ask for anything else." Said Austin.

"Thank you, Shepard." Said Tali.

Since they were still out of leads Austin had given everyone a very long break on the Citadel. He was currently walking through a part of the Wards, considered arranging another date with Liara.

"Maybe take her out for dinner this time? I know she'd love it." As he was still thinking however he heard a man mention his name.

"Hey. Been a long time, huh?" said the man.

"I'm sorry. Do we know each other?" Austin asked. There was something familiar about the man.

"I guess you don't remember me. Lieutenant Zabaleta? I worked with your mother once." Said the
man. "We served on the carrier Einstein. That was 12, 13 years back. You were just a kid then."

"I didn't really see her much that tour. The ship was on patrol most of the time." Said Austin.

"Hey, call your mom up and ask. She'd remember old Zabaleta. She'd vouch for me." Said Zabaleta.
"Listen, I need a favour. I'm kind of short on money these days. I hate hitting you up for money, but
a man's gotta eat, right? Could you spare something? Maybe 20 credits?"

"I see no harm in it. It's not a problem at all. Here you go." Said Austin as he handed over 20 credits.

"Your mother always did say you were a good kid, just like your father. She's right, you know that?
Thanks." Said Zabaleta.

Austin headed back to the Normandy which was still in dry dock. He didn't bother getting out of his
armour. He'd only be a minute after all. Just contact his mother, ask him about Zabaleta and then
hopefully get back to thinking of a way to pass the time.

"Computer, give me a real-time connection to the dreadnought Kilimanjaro. I want to speak to my
mother, Captain Shepard." He said.

There was a brief pause and then the familiar hologram of Captain Hannah Shepard appeared in
front of her son.

"Shepard spe— Oh, hi sweetie. I'm afraid I don't have time for a personal chat right now. I'm on
duty." Said Hannah. She looked very pleased to see her son again. She didn't often speak to him
when he had his Helldiver armour on, but she still felt he looked very proud in it.

"Don't worry Mom. I won't take up much of your time. Do you remember a Lieutenant Zabaleta
from the Einstein?" Austin asked.

"Ernesto? Have you heard from him? He was one of the marines who guarded the CIC. We shared a
watch. He was a good friend of me and your Father's. I lost track of him after- there was an
incident." Said Hannah.

"I've seen him here on the Citadel. Looks like he's had some hard times." Said Austin.

"I don't doubt it. You remember the Batarian raid on Mindoir, in 2170? The Helldivers stopped that.
Actually, no you wouldn't. You hadn't joined them. The Einstein's' task group responded to the
mayday. The Batarians were still retreating from the Helldiver armies when the marines hit
groundside. Zabaleta was one of the first down. He… He was never quite the same after."

"What happened down there exactly? The Helldivers hardly speak of Mindoir anymore." Austin
asked.

"About every abomination that a sentient being can do to another. As you know, to a slaver, a person
is just an animal. And humans aren't always like out here. We heard about corrailling, Culling. They'd
shoot those they couldn't use. Implant control devices in the skulls of those they could. Without
anaesthetic." Said Hannah.

"Oh yes. Thanks to us though, the Batarians haven't been able to get the technology to do that for a
very long time." Said Austin as he remembered some of the barbaric things he'd seen slaves do under
Batarian control. "I'm guessing Zabaleta has post-traumatic stress because of what he saw?"

"He tried to keep working, but it rode him. He showed up drunk on duty more and more. We
couldn't always cover for me. Your Father disapproved heavily of him after that." Said Hannah. "The Alliance discharged him. Everyone knew he drank because of what he'd seen down there. Even if he never talked about it. Especially because he never talked about it."

"For it to have affected him that deeply, he must have been a very sensitive man." Said Austin sadly.

"He was. Always in laughter and tears. He had the same sort of sense of humour you and your father do. Only he was way more fragile than you both are. If you see him, tell him we still worry about him. Tell him to go to the Veteran's Affairs Office." Said Hannah.

"I'll make that first priority, Mum." Said Austin as he saluted to the Captain.

"Always like your Father, Austin. I have to go. But take care of yourself out there." Said Hannah.

"I will. Say hello to Sarah for me." Said Austin.

"I'll make sure I do, son. You're making us all proud. By the way, I heard recently you got a girlfriend. I don't have the time to go into the specifics, but treat her well. I hope one day to meet her. Kilimanjaro out." Said Hannah as her hologram vanished.

Austin headed back to the Citadel and found Zabaleta.

"Hey, back again, eh? Don't suppose you got any credits to spare?" Zabaleta asked.

"I spoke to my mother. She told me about what happened on Mindoir." Said Austin.

"Did she? I wonder. People tied like prize hogs. Locked in cages, clawing and screaming as they're loaded into cargo pods." Said Zabaleta as he remembered some of the things he'd seen on Mindoir.

"I know how you feel. I've seen the same things many times as a Helldiver. You're not the only one who's suffered from those sights. Many Helldivers can't always handle it either." Said Austin calmly.

"And we couldn't reach them. The Batarian defences had us pinned. Dozens trying to advance. All we could was watch as they hauled people away. Your Helldivers eventually arrived to help us but they arrived just too late. I've been looking for 13 years for something to make that sight go away. What have you got? Huh?" Zabaleta asked.

"I've not giving you money to drink yourself to death. You need to stop this." Said Austin.

"If you don't have a better option, just give me 20 credits. A good bottle of whisky. Enough to stop the dreams." Zabaleta begged.

"My mother said to go to the Veteran's Affairs Office. You're not the only one who's seen that brand of hell. They can help you." Said Austin.

"The VAO-? God. If she wants me to go talk to someone, fine. I'll do it. For her. Your parents always used stick up for me. Heh. She always was naïve. All the VAO does is pump you full of chemicals. If she wants to talk, tell her she can reach me through the Citadel VAO." Said Zabaleta as he left.

"Commander. I hope you plan to be civil this time. I don't enjoy getting cut off mid conversation or being ignored." Said the Asari Councillor.

The Citadel Council had contacted Austin saying that they had a new lead on Saren. At the moment though they were still cross with the Helldiver for cutting them off last time and ignoring them after
"Don't piss me off again and I won't cut you off." Austin retaliated.

"You don't make demands of us, Shepard. Spectres answer to the Council, not the other way around!" said the Turian Councillor.

"You need to back off and let me do my job! I never wanted to be a Spectre so I can easily just quit and find Saren on my own!" said Austin.

"Enough!" said the Asari Councillor. "We've received information that may be critical to your mission against Saren."

"Go ahead then. I'm listening." Said Austin as he crossed his arms.

"We've received an urgent message from one of our infiltration units in the Traverse." Said the Salarian Councillor.

"You mean spies?" Austin asked suspiciously.

"Spectres tend to attract a lot of attention, Commander. But they are only one arm of the Council. Special tasks groups are often a better option. A bit like your Helldivers as well." said the Asari Councillor.

"We currently have several infiltration units stationed on Virmire." Said the Salarian Councillor.

"Did they find anything useful?" Austin asked.

"Unfortunately the message we received was little more than static. Considering your mission involving Saren. We felt you should be notified of this mission. The signal was sent on a channel reserved for critical missions." the Salarian Councillor replied.

"I'll look into it." Said Austin.

"Good luck, Commander. We will keep you informed if we learn anything else." said the Asari Councillor.

The Council vanished and Austin went into the CIC. He plotted a course for Virmire. With any luck, Saren was probably there right now.

Next chapter will be Virmire.
Chapter 18, Divided We Fall

Here's the Virmire chapter. At this rate, the whole story should be finished by the end of May. I can then spell check the whole story and start writing Episode 2 which will be called The Collector War.

I hope you enjoy this chapter and the nice little romantic bit I've included.

Chapter 18

Divided We Fall

With the possibility of Saren being on Virmire being very high, Austin felt it best to Wrex and Liara for the mission. He'd need Liara's biotics defiantly and it wouldn't hurt to have the extra firepower from Wrex.

"Commander, I'm reading a signal. Must be our Salarian infiltration team." Came Joker's voice over the radio.

"Check out those defence towers." Said Kaiden as he examined some of the orbital scans.

"Drop the Mako. We'll go in hot and take them out." Said Austin as he, Liara and Wrex climbed into the rover.

"I'll get you in underneath their radar, Commander." Said Joker as the cargo bay doors opened. The bright light from Virmire's sun flooded in, revealing the beautiful landscapes and beaches of the planet.

Austin accelerated and the Mako sped forward out of the Normandy. After a small drop the Mako dropped down.

"We've got a clean drop, Commander." Came Joker's voice over the comm.

"Stay out of range and continue evasive maneuvers until we bring those AA towers down." Said Austin into his wrist communicator.

"I know the drill. Meet you at the camp once those towers are off-line. Joker out." Came Jokers voice as the comm ended.

The majority of the drive was actually very peaceful, which was quite surprising. Occasionally though they did have to stop in order to open several gates. After fighting their way through the Geth forces and finally making it too the Salarian camp where the Normandy had landed.

Austin disembarked from the Mako and headed over to who he assumed was the Salarian leader who was talking with Ashley.

"So what are we supposed to do now?" Ashley asked.

"Stay put until we can come up with a plan." Said the Salarian.

"Are you in charge here? What's the situation?" Austin asked.
"A Helldiver? I've heard many stories. It's an honor to finally meet one in person. I am Captain Kirrahe, Third Infiltration Regiment STG. You and your crew have just landed in the middle of a hotzone. Every AA gun within ten miles had been alerted to your presence." Said the Salarian.

"What are we supposed to do in the meantime? We can't just stay here." Said Austin.

"We stay put until the Council sends the reinforcements we requested." Said Kirrahe.

"We are the reinforcements." Said Kaiden.


"They couldn't understand the transmission you sent. We were sent to investigate." Said Austin.

"That is a repetition of our task. I lost half my men investigating this place." Said Kirrahe.

"So what have you found?" Kaiden asked.

"Saren's base of operations. He's set up a research facility here, but it's crawling with Geth and very well fortified. To make matters worse, the Geth are even more organized than before after that leader of theirs arrived. A massive, mutated Geth Prime with spikes on its body and a plasma blaster. And the whole base is very well fortified." Said Kirrahe.

"What? The Terror Geth's still alive? I thought I killed that thing back on Feros!" Austin cursed angrily. Once again the Terror Geth had survived. How many times would it take before he put down that synthetic for good?

"Well it seems it survived. Anyway, we've intercepted many messages referring to Saren. This is his facility, there's no doubt about that." Said Kirrahe.

"So what's Saren researching?" Austin asked.

"He's using the facility to breed an army of Krogan." Kirrahe replied.

"How is that possible?" Wrex asked as overheard Kirrahe mention his people.

"Apparently, Saren has discovered a cure for the Genophage." Kirrahe answered.

"Great. The Geth are bad enough. But with a Krogan army… he'd be unstoppable." Said Austin.

"Exactly my thoughts. We must ensure this facility and its secrets are destroyed." Said Kirrahe.

"Destroyed? I don't think so. Our people are dying. This cure can save them." Wrex objected.

"If that cure leaves this planet, the Krogan will become unstoppable. We can't make the same mistake again." Kirrahe disagreed.

Wrex immediately walked right up to Kirrahe at that.

"We are not a mistake!" he yelled. Wrex then stomped off angrily.

"Is he going to be a problem? We already have enough angry Krogan to deal with." Kirrahe asked.

"He'll be fine. Don't worry, I'll talk with him." Said Austin.

Austin walked up to Wrex who was taking out his anger on several fish in the water by shooting
"This isn't right, Shepard. If there's a cure for the Genophage, we can't destroy it." Said Wrex.

"Wrex, listen to me. I know you're upset about this. But Saren's the enemy here. You should be mad at him, not me." Said Austin calmly. He wasn't scared of Wrex. If the Krogan went hostile on him, he could easily defeat him. But he would rather not. He'd grown to respect the Battlemaster and he'd hate to lose such a valuable asset.

"Really? Saren created a cure for my people. You want to destroy it. Help me out here, Shepard. The lines between friend and foe are getting a little blurry from where I stand." Said Wrex. It was clear that Wrex was conflicted. He could still be reasoned with.

"This isn't a cure, it's a weapon. And if Saren uses it, you won't be around to reap the benefits. None of us will." Said Austin.

"That's a chance we should be willing to take. This is the fate of my entire people we are talking about!" said Wrex. He then seemed to appeal to his better side. "I've been loyal to you so far. Hell, you did more for me than my family ever did. But, if I'm going to keep following you, I need to know we're doing it for the right reasons."

Wrex suddenly drew his gun on Austin. Austin also drew his SMG. Now they were in a standoff. Austin racked his brain for how to best appeal to Wrex. Finally he came up with a good enough answer.

"Wrex, these Krogan are not your people! Their clones! Slaves! Tools of Saren! Is that what you want for your people?" he said.

There was a long, tense pause as Wrex pondered this.

"No. We were tools for the Citadel Council once. To thank us for wiping out the Rachni they sterilized us all. I doubt that Saren will be as generous." He said. But he still kept his gun on the Helldiver.

"Exactly. Plus, who's to say he'd keep his promise to give the cure to you? As long as he has this he can manipulate the Krogan to do anything. He'll withhold that cure from you for as long as he wants. He may never give it to you!" Austin persuaded.

Wrex once again pondered this and finally lowered his gun. "Alright, Shepard. You've made your point. I don't like this, but I trust you enough to follow your lead. Just one thing… When we find Saren, I want his head!" he said.

"I'll make sure you get it, Wrex." Said Austin. He extended his hand and Wrex shook it.

With Wrex sorted out, Austin headed over to Kirrahe.

"I am impressed at your ability to reason with the Krogan. The assault on Saren's base will be difficult enough as it is." Said the Salarian.

"You have a plan then, I take it?" Austin asked.

"Of sorts. We can convert our ship's drive system into twenty-kiloton ordnance. Crude, but effective." Said Kirrahe.

"Nice. Drop that nuke from orbit and Saren can kiss his ass goodbye." Said Ashley.
"Unfortunately, the facility is too well-fortified for that. We'll need to place the bomb at a precise location. The bomb must be taken to the far side of the facility. Your ship can drop it off, but we'll need to infiltrate the base, disable the AA guns, and pacify any ground forces first." Said Kirrahe.

"You want us to go in on foot? We don't have enough men." Said Kaiden.

"You've got me." Austin reminded.

"Yeah. The Commander can pack the strength and firepower of at least 4 more men." Ashley concurred.

"Nevertheless though, Kaiden is right. It does sound a bit risky. Is there no other way?" Austin asked.

"No. I'm afraid not. But I think we can work around that." Kirrahe answered. "I'm going to divide my men into three teams and hit the front of the facility. While we've got their attention, you can sneak your "Shadow" team in the back."

"A good plan. But your people are going to get slaughtered." Said Austin.

"We're tougher than we look, Commander. But it's true. I don't expect many of us will make it out alive." Said Kirrahe. "And that makes what I'm going to ask even more difficult. I need one of your men to accompany me. To help coordinate the teams."

"Then we need someone who knows Alliance communication protocols." Said Austin.

"I volunteer, Commander." Said Kaiden.

"Not so fast, LT. Commander Shepard will need you to arm the nuke. I'll go with the Salarians." Ashley objected.

"With all due respect, Gunnery Chief, it's not your place to decide." Said Kaiden sternly.

"Why is it that whenever someone says "with all due respect" they really mean "kiss my ass?" said Ashley angrily.

"That's enough you two!" Austin shouted. He then turned back to Kirrahe. "Captain, who would be better suited for this mission?"

"Either of these two will do, Commander. Both seem willing to sacrifice their lives if necessary, though if we are lucky, such sacrifices won't be required." Kirrahe answered.

Austin took a moment to think. After a few minutes he finally made his decision.

"Ash, you're with Kirrahe. No heroics, understood?"

"Aye, aye, Commander!" said Ashley.

"I will have the ordnance loaded onto the Normandy and brief your crew on its destination sequencing." Said Kirrahe.

"When do we begin then?" Austin asked.

"We will assault the base tomorrow at dawn. In the meantime have your crew get some rest. They're going to need it." Said Kirrahe.
The captain walked off and Austin turned to Ashley.

"Well, this is it. Don't do anything stupid while I'm gone, LT." she said. She sounded nervous.

"We'll be fine. You'll see." Said Kaiden.

"Yeah, I just… good luck." Said Ashley. Once again she made it sound as though this would be the last time they'd see each other.

"It's a dangerous situation. Keep your eyes open and be ready for anything. In my time with Alpha squad we've faced far worse missions. Whatever happens, everyone just keep shooting. We go in hard, hit 'em harder, and we'll be the only damn thing that comes out on the other side!" Said Austin.

"You bet, old friend!" said Ashley.

"Take care of yourself, Ash. The bears are on me when this is over." Said Austin.

Austin sat by himself on the beach, watching the sun set in the distance. Everyone else had turned in by now for some early sleep to prepare for the crack of dawn tomorrow. Not him though. He would eventually get some rest himself, but he at least like to keep his spirits calm by watching the sunset. It always made him feel very peaceful. He had eve removed his helmet to enjoy the feel of the suns light and Virmire's air on his face. Plus the setting of the beach was a very pretty and calming sight. As he continued to admire the beautiful site he felt a presence behind him. He looked over his shoulder to see Liara walking up to him.

"I was wondering where you were." She said as she sat down in the sand next to him. "Can't sleep?"

"I will. I'm just enjoying the sun set." Said Austin. It made him even happier to know that she was here with him.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Liara asked.

"I know one thing that's more beautiful." Said Austin as he looked at Liara.

Liara looked at him and smile, knowing full well what he was referring too. She smiled at him.

"Always so sweet." She said.

Both lovers intertwined their hands together and continued to watch the sun set over the camp.

"I only wish we could be here under better circumstances. Maybe once this is all over we might take shore leave here. Just you and me. I wonder why my old Squad and I never considered leave here." Said Austin.

Liara then nuzzled up to Austin and rested her head against his armoured shoulder. Austin smiled at her and put his arm around her.

"You ready for tomorrow?" he asked.

"You're strength gives me strength, my love." Said Liara.

Austin looked down and gave her a peck on her fringe.

"What do you think we'll do when this ends?" he asked.
"See where our relationship goes. I love you. You do know that right?" Liara asked.

"Of course I do. And I love you too." Said Austin as he cuddled his girlfriend.

"You wanna get married?" Liara asked.

Austin was very shocked by this. "Right now?" he asked.

"No. I mean, do you think we'll get married?" Liara corrected.

"I don't think that we may get married. I prefer to think that we will get married." Austin smiled as he rested his head against Liara's.

"I like to think that too." Said Liara.

The Asari then lifted her head off of Austin's shoulder and looked into his eyes. Then sun had disappeared now. Only the faint glow still remained in the sky.

"You should come to bed. You'll need the rest." She said.

"No sex tonight though, Liara. We need to be focused." Said Austin.

"I know. I understand completely." Said Liara. "One last kiss at least?"

"That, I can do."

Both lovers sealed their lips together and refused to stop for kiss for a long time.

Morning dawned on Virmire. Austin, his crew, and the Salarian's where all up very early so that they could prepare everything and be ready to attack at first light.

"This is it, Commander Shepard. Are your crew prepared?" Kirrahe asked.

"They are. We're ready when you are, Captain." Said Austin.

"Excellent. Then if you'll excuse me, I need to prepare my men." Said the Salarian.

The rest of the Salarian's gathered in front of Kirrahe. He began to address them all with a motivational speech. It reminded Austin a bit of himself. He'd done a lot of speeches for Alpha Squad. It brought back a lot of memories.

"You all know the mission and what is at stake. I have come to trust each of you with my life, but I have also heard murmurs of discontent. I share your concerns. We are trained for espionage. We would be legends, but the records are sealed. Glory in battle is not our way. Think of our heroes: the Silent Step, who defeated a nation with a single shot. Or the Ever Alert, who kept armies at bay with hidden facts. These giants do not seem to give us solace here, but they are not all that we are. Before the network, there was the fleet. Before diplomacy, there were soldiers. Our influence stopped the Rachni, but before that, we held the line. Our influence stopped the Krogan, but before that, we held the line! Our influence will stop Saren! In the battle today, we will hold the line!" Kirrahe said to his soldiers. He then turned back to Austin. "Good luck, Commander. I hope we will meet again."

"See you on the other side, Captain." Said Austin.

Austin, Liara and Wrex began their push towards Saren's base from the back. Almost instantly they found themselves fighting several Geth guards. Along the way, they managed to destroy a Geth
"I don't know which is worse. The Geth, or all this sand in my... never mind." Said Liara.

Austin chuckled slightly when she said that.

"I'll help you clean it all out later." He flirted.

Liara giggled and blushed slightly behind her helmet.

"Get a room, you two!" said Wrex.

Eventually, after fighting their way through hordes of Geth, they made it into Saren's lab.

"There is something foul in the air here." Said Liara.

Even Austin had to admit that the whole atmosphere of this place felt wrong. Eventually they reached the controls for the base security.

"We've got access to base security. Should be able to cut off the alarms from here. Might even be able to trigger alarms on the far side of the base. It'll clear the guards out for us, but they might be too much for Williams and the Salarians to handle." Said Wrex.

"Just disable the alarms. We can handle any guards inside. The Salarians have got enough trouble as it is." Said Austin.

Further into the base and the whole atmosphere was getting even more eerie. Something was definitely going on here. As they exited an elevator, they found themselves inside a laboratory. In it was a Krogan scientist, an Asari scientist, and several Husks that where being experimented on.

"What is going on here? Where are the guards? Where is Saren?" said the doctor as he noticed the intruders.

"No! Stay back! This is important work! This is the glorious salvation of my species! You will not destroy the work we have started!" The Krogan shouted as Austin, Liara and Wrex fired on the attacking Husks and the Asari assistant. Wrex forced the Krogan scientist on his knees.

"You're a traitor to our people!" the scientist choked.

"No! You're the traitor for allying with Saren!" said Wrex angrily as he unloaded a shotgun round into the scientist's head. Austin and Liara meanwhile finished off the last of the Husks.

Eventually they found several prison cells. One of them had a Salarian prisoner in it.

"You're not a Geth, and you're not wearing a lab coat. I guess I'm glad to see you. Lieutenant Ganto Imness of the third infiltration regiment, captured during recon. I assume the fleet was called in to destroy the base?" the Salarian asked.

"I'm sorry. The transmission wasn't clear. The fleet isn't coming." Said Austin.

"I see. Then you must be the infiltration team. I know the Captain. He will want this facility destroyed. My team was altered, indoctrinated. He knew about the breeding grounds. But the indoctrination is a greater threat, and far more horrifying." Said Imness. "I watched good people reduced to mindless husks. There wasn't anything left. Others died during the experiments. I envy them."
Austin noticed that there were more Salarians in another cell. They seemed to be completely unaware of the Helldiver and his comrades.

"Do you know anything about the experiments they were conducting? Austin asked.

"They were studying indoctrination. Symptoms, progress. Saren uses it to control his people, but I don't think he fully understands it. I don't know much else. I just saw what it did to the others. Turned them into empty husks. I can't end up like that. Please – let me out!" Said Imness.

Austin took a very quick moment to consider. The Salarian seemed to be fine though. Even if he was a threat, he wouldn't stand much chance against them anyway.

"I'm opening your cell, but then you're on your own." He said.

The Helldiver walked up to the controls to the cell and opened them.

"Don't look bad and hope to outrun the blast, hmm? A better chance than I had before you showed up. Thank you, Helldiver. And good luck. You'll need it." Said Imness as he left.

The team then turned their attention to the Salarians in the next cell.

"They look docile. Their minds are gone." Said Liara.

"This is no way to treat a prisoner. Kill them sure, but leave them like this?" Wrex disapproved.

"Let them out. There not a threat to us. Give them a chance to escape the nuke." Said Austin.

The team opened the door. The Salarians didn't do anything. It seemed as though they had no brain function. The team went back to their mission and continued through the base. Eventually they found themselves in a science office. There was an Asari scientist hiding behind the desk.

"Don't shoot! Please, I just want to get out of here before it's too late." The Asari begged.

Austin lowered his gun when he noticed that the Asari was unarmed.

"I'm not going to hurt you. Who are you?" he inquired.

"Rana Thanoptis, neurospecialist. But this job isn't worth dying over. Or worse." The Asari said. She sounded very panicked. "You think the indoctrination only affects prisoners? Sooner or later, Saren will want to dissect my brain, too!"

"I thought this was a breeding facility." Said Austin, confused.

"Not this level. We're studying Sovereign's effect on organic minds. At least, that's what I assumed. Saren kept us in the dark as much as possible." Said Rana.

"That still doesn't mean I trust you." Said Austin.

"Please! I can help you. This elevator behind me goes to Saren's private lab. I can get you in." said Rana. The Asari walked up to the door and unlocked it. The panel went green to indicate so. "See? Full access. All of Saren's private files. Are we good? Can I go?"

"Everybody deserves a second chance. You've earned yours. Though, I should warn you that I'm blowing this place to hell and gone. If you want to make it out alive, you'd better start running." Said Austin.
Rana's eyes went wide with horror. "What? You can't... but I'll never..."

Faster than Austin had ever seen anyone move, Rana fled.

"That was fun." Said Wrex.

Saren’s lab didn’t seem to be much. All it appeared to be was a large room. But then Liara noticed something on the lower levels.

"It's another beacon!" she said. Austin knew immediately what she was thinking. He walked over to the beacon and fiddled around slightly with controls to the beacon. Once again he found himself hauled into the air and visions began to flash before his mind. This time though, the transition was painless. The Helldiver felt himself relax. He didn't pass out. Finally the beacon dropped him. He landed upright. It had shook him up a bit, but he was fine.

"Are you alright?" Liara asked as she helped him up.

"Yeah." Austin replied. "Let's get out of here."

As they neared the door however, a large red holographic projection of some kind of creature appeared before them.

"I get the feeling something bad is about to happen." Said Wrex.

"You are not Saren!" The hologram boomed.

"What is that? Some kind of VI interface?" Liara asked.

"Rudimentary creatures of blood and flesh. You touch my mind, fumbling in ignorance, incapable of understanding." Said the hologram.

There was something very familiar about the holograms appearance. But just couldn't quite put his finger on it.

"I do not think this is a VI..." said Liara nervously.

The holograms voice was probably even scarier than the Terror Geth's voice. The slightest sound of it gave Austin goosebumps on his skin. Plus his suit was detecting massive amounts of dangerous airwaves. This thing was more than just a hologram.

"There is a realm of existence so far beyond your own you cannot even imagine it. I am beyond your comprehension. I am Sovereign!" the hologram boomed.

Everyone recoiled back slightly. Saren's flagship. The dreadnought that had attacked Eden Prime, was alive? Then it all clicked into place for Austin. All this time they had thought that Sovereign was one of the ships that the Reapers used. But they had been so wrong from the start. The ships weren't by the Reapers. They were the Reapers!

"Sovereign isn't just some Reaper ship Saren found. It's an actual Reaper!" he said.

Sovereign seemed to find the name odd. "Reaper? A label created by the Protheans to give voice to their destruction. In the end, what they chose to call us is irrelevant. We simply are." It said.

"The Protheans vanished 50,000 years ago. You couldn't have been there. It's impossible!" Liara objected.
Austin had expected the Prothean expert to say that. Sovereign didn't show any fear or emotion. Nor did it show any sign of doubt to this accusation.

"Organic life is nothing but a genetic mutation, an accident. Your live are measured in years and decades. You wither and die. We are eternal. The pinnacle of evolution and existence. Before us, you are nothing. Your extinction is inevitable. We are the end of everything." It said.

"If you think I fear you, your very wrong. Whatever your plan it, it's going to fail. The whole galaxy is united and ready to face to you!" said Austin.

Sovereign however remained completely unaffected. "Confidence born of ignorance, Helldiver. The cycle cannot be broken. Yours is not the first, and it will not be the last!"

"Cycle? What cycle?" Wrex asked.

"The pattern has repeated itself more times than you can fathom. Organic civilizations rise, evolve, and at the apex of their glory, they are extinguished. The Protheans were not the first. They did not create the Citadel. They did not forge the Mass Relays. They merely found them, the legacy of my kind." Said Sovereign.

"But… Why construct the Mass Relays, then leave them for someone else to find?" Austin asked, in slight disbelief.

"Your civilization is based on the technology of the mass relays, our technology. By using it, your society develops along the paths we desire. We impose order on the chaos of organic evolution. You exist because we allow it. And you will end because we demand it." Said Sovereign.

"They are harvesting us! Letting us advance to the level they need, then wiping us out!" said Liara in shock.

Austin now took back everything he had said about doubting that the Reapers existed. All of them where gone now. The Reapers where far more than a simple legend. They still existed. Austin however mastered his courage.

"You're not even alive. Not really. You're just a machine. And machines can be broken!" he said.

"You are quite confident for someone who uses a machine." Said Sovereign.

Austin hesitated. He hated to admit it, but the Reaper was right. Every single Helldiver used a machine. Their suits.

"Still. A technology that is not derived from ours is impressive. But your words as still as empty as your future will be. I am the vanguard of your destruction. This exchange is over!" said Sovereign.

Almost instantly, the whole place shook and the windows shattered. Sovereign's hologram disappeared.

"Commander? We got trouble!" came Joker's voice over the comm.

"Hit me, Joker." Said Austin. This day just kept getting better and better.

"That ship, Sovereign? It's moving. I don't know what you did down there, but that thing just pulled a turn that would shear any other ship in half. It's coming your way and it's coming hard! You need to wrap things up in there – fast!" Said Joker.
"This console is no longer functional. Orders, Shepard?" Liara asked.

"Let's head for the breeding facility. Time to finish what we started!" said Austin.

After disabling the AA guns and clearing out the Geth, the Normandy landed. Kaiden and a few other Alliance soldiers disembarked with the bomb. They placed it right near the tower in the landing area.

Kaiden then pressed his hand to his ear piece and contacted Kirrahe and Ashley. "Bomb is in position, we're all set he-" but he was interrupted by Ashley's voice and the sounds of heavy fire.

"Commander, can you read me?" she said.

"The nuke is almost ready, Ash. Get to the rendezvous point!" Austin said into his wrist communicator.

"Negative, Commander. The Terror Geth and his troops have us pinned down on the AA tower. We've taken heavy casualties. We'll never make the rendezvous point in time!" Came Ashley's voice.

"Hold tight my old friend. We're coming to get you." Said Austin.

"Negative! Just make sure that nuke is set. We'll hold them as long as we-" Ashley objected. But the comm cut off.

"It's okay, Commander. I need a couple of minutes to finish arming the bomb. Got get them and met me back here." Said Kaiden.

"Right. Liara, Wrex, you're with me! Up to the AA tower. Move!" Austin ordered.

As the team neared the AA tower, they saw a Geth drop ship heading for the bomb site.

"Geth are sending in reinforcements." Said Wrex.

"Heads up, L-T. We just spotted a troop ship headed to your location." Came Ashley's voice over the radio.

"It's already here. There's Geth pouring out all over the bomb site." Came Kaiden's voice, also over the radio.

"Can you hold them off?!" Austin asked.

"There's too many. I don't think we can survive until you get here. I'm activating the bomb." Came Kaiden's voice.

"What the hell are you doing Alenko?! Delay that command!" Austin shouted into his communicator.

"I can't, Commander! We have to make sure this bomb goes off no matter the cost!" came Kaiden's response.

"Damn it, Kaiden!" Austin cursed.

"It's done, Commander. Go get Williams and get the hell out of here." Said Kaiden.

"Screw that! We can handle ourselves. Go back and get Alenko!" Ashley objected.
Austin was now left with one of the most difficult choice of his life. In all his life with Alpha Squad, he’d never had to choose between squad mates. Kaiden was a superior officer to Ashley. But Ashley was his best friend. He couldn't just leave his old childhood friend to die. Plus the Salarians where with her. Eventually, Austin let his instincts decide.

"Ash, radio Joker and tell him to meet us on the AA tower!" Austin ordered.

"Yes, Commander. I…” Ashley hesitated.

"It's the right choice, and you know it, Ash!" said Kaiden.

"Just hold one, Kaiden. We're coming for you too." Said Austin.

"I think we both know that's not gonna happen, Austin." Said Kaiden.

The Helldiver sighed. Kaiden was right.

"I'm sorry, Kaiden. I had to make a choice." He said.

"I understand, Austin. It's been an honor to fight at your side." Said Kaiden as he cut of the communication.

The team immediately made for the elevator to the AA tower. The whole place was a blaze with gunfire and plasma shots from the Terror Geth's blaster.

"Liara, Wrex. Deal with Geth soldiers. I have a score to settle with that Terror Geth!" Austin ordered.

Wrex and Liara threw all that they had at the Terror Geth’s soldiers. The Terror Geth noticed it's old nemesis.

"Shepard! We meet again!" it said.

"This time, I'm going to truly terminate you!" Austin yelled as he fired at the Geth.

The Terror Geth threw up its shield and retaliated with a plasma shot. It just barely missed the Helldiver.

"Why do you fight, Helldiver?! Our gods have stood before millions of civilizations, all superior to you. They have constantly prevailed! What hope do you have?!" the Terror Geth taunted.

"Your "gods" are just machines! And they'll break just as I will break you!" Austin yelled back as he continued to fire. The shield however, didn't even crack. The Terror Geth fired another shot. This time, Austin wasn't quick enough. The blast missed him, but he wasn't fast enough to get away from the explosion it caused. He was sent flying and his rifle flew out of his hands.

"Only human." Said the Terror Geth as it readied for the final shot. Several shots however suddenly hit the Terror Geth's back. It turned around to see it's attacker. Ashley and the Salarians, along with Captain Kirrahe had managed to recover and where firing on the Geth. Some of them broke through the Geth's armour before it put its shield back up. True it was now out of harm's way, but not for long. For it had turned its back to Austin, who had activated his mini nuke launcher.

The Terror Geth reacted too late, and got caught in the nuke shot. When the smoke cleared, the damage it had sustained was immense. The shot had blown off the Geth's left arm, shoulder, and part of its torso as well. The Terror Geth fell to its knees from the damage.
Just as Austin got up however, a biotic warp blast impacted close to him from the air. Austin immediately picked his rifle back up and looked to the sky for the attacker.

Saren had finally joined the fray. Riding on a hovering Geth platform, Saren threw biotic after biotic attack at the team. Liara and Wrex ran for cover. Austin did the same too and also fired several shots at the Turian. All of Saren's biotic attacks missed him, but the very last one hit him in the left torso, damaging his armour and injuring him badly. The Helldiver grunted in pain and fell to his knees, clutching his side. Fortunately though, he managed to crawl to cover just as Saren touched down right beside his damaged second in command.

Austin blind fired a few shots at Saren, but they were no good. The Turian's biotic barriers disintegrated them.

As Austin began applying some emergency medi-gel to his bleeding wound, Saren spoke.

"This has been an impressive diversion Shepard. My Geth where utterly convinced the Salarians where the real threat. Of course, it was all for nothing. I can't let you disrupt what I've accomplished here. You can't possibly understand what's really at stake." He said.

"I know that you've allied with a Reaper. But why?!" Austin groaned as his side stopped bleeding and the medi-gel slowly resealed the wound. He then activated his omni tool.

"Activating emergency repair protocols." Said his suit's computer.

"You've seen the vision from the beacons, Shepard. You, of all people should understand what the Reapers are capable of. They cannot be stopped. Do not more yourself with pointless revolt. Do not sacrifice everything for the sake of petty freedoms. The Protheans tried to fight, and they were utterly destroyed." Said Saren.

Austin's finally finished repairing itself. For now, the damage and the rupture was patched up. But it would need to be properly repaired back on the Normandy. He winched slightly as the Medi-gel finally finished its job. He felt the pain in his torso disperse.

"Trillions dead. But what if they had bowed before the invaders? Would the Protheans still exist? Is submission not preferable to extinction?" Saren asked.

"I'd rather die than live under the rule of the Reapers!" said Austin.

"Now you see why I never came forward with this to the Citadel Council. We organics are driven by emotion instead of logic. We will fight even when we know we cannot win. But if we work with the Reapers—if we make ourselves useful—think how many lives could be spared! Once I understood this, I joined Sovereign, though I was aware of the.. dangers, I had hoped this facility could protect me." Said Saren.

"You're like every other poor bastard in this place. A tool Sovereign can use, then cast aside." Said Austin, now fully recovered from his injury.

"I've studied the effects of indoctrination. The more control Sovereign exerts, the less capable the subject becomes. That is my saving grace. Sovereign needs me to find the Conduit. My mind is still me own... for now. But the transformation from ally to servant can be subtle. I will not let it happen to me." Said Saren.

"Sovereign's manipulating you and you don't even know it! You're already under its power!" said Austin. It all made sense now. Saren wasn't the one in control. Sovereign was the one pulling all the strings. No one would ever ally with a race or being that would destroy everything.
"No! Sovereign needs me! If I find the Conduit, I've been promised a reprieve from the inevitable. That is my only hope."

"You expect that Reaper to honor that choice? Sovereign's kind have wiped out so many civilizations before us. What makes you think that they'll make an exception with you?" Austin tried to persuade.

"Do you think you can sway me, Shepard? Do you think I haven't already thought of this? Sovereign is a machine. It thinks like a machine. If I can prove my value, I become a resource worth maintaining. There is no other logical conclusion!" said Saren.

"So that's it? You could've stopped all this and yet you gave up. And in the end all you could think about was saving your own hide?!" Austin asked angrily. The indoctrination was even worse than it appeared. Saren truly believed he was doing the right thing.

"I'm not doing this for myself! Don't you see? Sovereign will succeed. It is inevitable. My way is the only way any of us will survive! I'm forging an alliance between us and the Reapers. Between organics and machines. And in doing so, I will save more lives than have ever existed." Said Saren.

"Over my dead body!" said Austin as he stood up. The initial feeling in his legs was painful, but it quickly went away.

"That is part of my plan anyway. You would undo my work. You would doom our entire civilization to complete annihilation. And for that, you will die!" said Saren.

Austin immediately raised his gun at Saren. Before he could though, the Turian used his biotics to charge right in front of the Helldiver. Taken by surprise, Austin was caught off guard. Saren used this to his advantage and used his Geth arm to fling Austin all the way to the other side of the AA tower. He also threw a biotic warp at Wrex and Liara. As Austin struggled to get back up, Saren grabbed him by the neck and hauled him up with his Geth arm, despite the Helldiver's immense weight. Austin could only struggle as Saren's mechanical grip began to tighten around his neck, choking his windpipe.

An alarm however distracted Saren, giving Austin an opening. Using all his strength, he punched Saren right in the face. Saren was knocked back by the punch and he let go of Austin's neck. As Austin got his breath back, Saren went back to his Geth platform. The damaged Terror Geth limped on as well.

"This isn't over, Shepard! We will meet again!" the Terror Geth struggled to say as the platform flew away.

As Austin watched Saren and The Terror Geth retreat, he saw the Normandy fly into view and touch down.

"Everyone, onto the Normandy!" he yelled.

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There we are. Little more for me to say after that.

Next chapter will be titled, Shepard's Plan. I'm pretty certain you are going to like it. Especially what Shepard says to the Council that causes him to lose his Spectre status.(Which is what he wants)

Please do keep those reviews coming.
Chapter 19, Shepard's plan

Yes! Finally managed to finish writing it all again after I lost it! Hope you enjoy this one. Just to let you know that Chapter 20 will be the night before Ilos and will contain Sex.

Please do enjoy this one, it's building up to an epic finale!

Chapter 19

Shepard's plan

"I… I can't believe Kaiden didn't make it out. How could we just leave him there?" said Ashley, her voice full of sorrow.

"Alenko knew the risks going in. He gave his life to save the rest of us." Said Austin.

"It should have been me, Commander. You know that." Said Ashley.

"You think I don't know that, Ash? You think that it was an easy choice for me to make?" said Austin. Truth be told, he also felt greatly for Kaiden's death, but he had to hide it. He had to remain strong for his team.

"I—I'm sorry, Shepard. You saved my life. I'm grateful for that. But it should have been me. Alenko was a superior officer. I would have gladly stayed behind." Said Ashley.

"Ashley, there's no right or wrong choice when it comes to a decision like that. But I had to make that call. I chose you. It wasn't your fault and it wasn't my fault. The only one to blame is Saren." Said Austin.

"Yes sir. I'm—we'll get it done." Said Ashley.

Then Liara spoke up.

"Commander? Excuse me for interrupting. But I have an idea. I think the beacon you found in Saren's base was similar to the one on Eden Prime. It may have filled in the missing pieces of your vision. I might be able to help you put all those pieces together." Said Liara.

"You want to join our minds again, don't you? Okay. Go ahead." Said Austin. He got up from his chair and removed his helmet so that Liara could place her hands on his face to properly meld with his mind.

"Relax, Shepard. Embrace Eternity!" she said.

Liara's eyes went black and the visions once again flashed before Austin's eyes. But this time, they were not blurred or unclear. They all made sense now. From what he could see, Austin saw the images of the Reapers descending from the skies and slaughtering the Protheans. Then the vision changed to show the far reaches of space, and a planet which he didn't recognize. The final bit of the vision showed what was clearly Sovereign. Finally everything came back to reality.

"I… I never thought the images would be so… intense. I need a moment to collect myself." Said Liara in a bit of shock.
"Did the vision make any sense to you?" Austin asked.

"There were other images. Locations. Places I recognized from my research… Ilos! The Conduit is one Ilos! That is why Saren needed to find the Mu Relay! It is the only way to get to Ilos." Liara replied.

"Then it sounds like that's our next destination." Said Austin.

"Forget it. The Mu Relay's inside the Terminus Systems. Alliance ships are not welcome there. Neither are Spectres." Said Tali.

"Helldivers are though. We operate in both Alliance space and the Terminus Systems. Plus if the coordinates for the Mu Relay are correct, we'll have to pass through Helldiver territory anyway. I can safely get us through." Said Austin.

"Saren will have his entire fleet orbiting Ilos. We will never make it down to the surface without reinforcements. You must alert the Council. We need a fleet to—ohhh… I am sorry. The joining is… exhausting. I should go to the medical bay and lie down for a moment." Said Liara.

"You go and do that. The rest of you, dismissed." Said Austin.

"Commander, there's a comm buoy nearby. I can link us in if you want to report back to the Citadel Council. You know, to warn them about Sovereign." Said Joker over the radio. His voice had more sorrow in it.

"Set the link up, Joker. We all know they're not going to listen. But they need to know." Said Austin.

"Patching it through." Said Joker.

The three orange holograms of the Council once again appeared in front of Austin.

"Commander Shepard. I'm pleased to see your mission on Virmire was a success." Said the Asari councillor.

"Saren is formidable enough without an army of Krogan serving under him." Said the Turian councillor.

"The Krogan would have served Sovereign. A Reaper." Said Austin.

The Council was silent for a while.

"Yes, we saw mention of this on your report. Sovereign. A sentient machine. A true artificial intelligence. This news is quite alarming… if it turns out to be accurate." Said the Salarian councillor.

"Of course it's accurate! You think I'd lie about something like this! Sovereign's a Reaper. Saren admitted it." Said Austin, slightly crossly.

"He's playing you, Shepard! Saren still has contacts on the Citadel. He probably saw your earlier reports. The ones talking about your vision. And the Reapers." Said the Turian councillor.

"It's highly possible Saren is using false information to throw you off balance. Our own intelligence has never turned up any corroborating information." Said the Salarian Councillor.

"Of course it hasn't! I tried to warn you about Saren. You didn't believe me then, and look how that turned out." Said Austin.
"I believe you humans have a saying; even a broken clock is right twice a day." Said the Turian councillor.

After that, Austin lost it.

"That's it! Here's another saying: got to hell! Joker, lose this channel! I'm done talking with these assholes!" Austin yelled.

Joker did as he was told and the holograms vanished.

"That never gets old does it." Said Joker.

Austin took a moment to calm down and get rid of his anger at the Council. He even took his anger on a nearby chair. Fortunately he was able to quickly calm down.

Austin sat on the edge of the bed in his quarters. He was still trying to get over the fact that he had been forced to make a critical, life changing decision that had caused the death of one of his squad mates. Back when he had worked with Alpha Squad, he had never been forced to make a decision like that. There’d always been an alternative and better decision.

He then heard the door open and looked up to see Liara. She sat next to him on the bed.

"It's not your fault, Austin. Kaiden knew that only one of them would survive this." She said.

"I know. But it still doesn't make me feel any better." Said Austin. "I made that choice, and that choice got him killed."

"Kaiden never regretted anything. He never blamed you for choosing Ashley and he considered it an honor to fight with you until the end. Besides, I believe you did say that there's never a right or wrong choice when it comes to a decision like that." Said Liara.

Austin's mood brightened a bit. Liara always managed to cheer him up.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say that some of me is starting to rub off on you." Said Austin.

Liara leant against Austin's shoulder and he put his arm around her.

"I've been thinking about Saren. I actually feel a little sorry for him now." She said.

"So do I. I never thought I would, but after learning the truth about the Reapers and hearing what he said on Virmire, I now do. He's become a slave to the Reapers and he can't even realise it." Said Austin.

"He is trapped inside his own mind. Part of him senses his identity slowly being swallowed up by Sovereign, but he is powerless to stop it. I wonder how he first fell into Sovereign's trap? Did he think he could somehow stop the Reapers from returning? Or was he simply driven by a lust for power and glory?" Liara asked.

"Whatever Saren's reasons may have been, they're long gone now. He has to be stopped." Said Austin.

"Yes, I suppose you are right. He may be Sovereign's victim, but he is also a threat to all life as we know it. Let's not spend every free minute talking about Saren. It is bad enough we are chasing him across the galaxy." Said Liara.
"You know that I like talking with you, Liara. No matter what the subject." said Austin.

"You have been very understanding with me, Austin. Very patient. I appreciate that. I know there are some strange beliefs about my people. I am familiar with the legend of Asari promiscuity. But those rumours have little basis on fact."

Austin was slightly confused by this last statement. "Not sure I understand what you mean." He said.

"When one of my people joins with an individual from another species, it is a very deep and spiritual exchange. We do not enter lightly into a Union." Said Liara.

Now Austin understood what Liara was talking about.

"You make it sound almost mystical." He said.

"A true union goes far beyond an ordinary melding. It is a connection that transcends the physical universe. Two become one. Thoughts and senses merge. Identities intertwine. Memories and emotions weave themselves together, becoming entangled in a single rapturous whole. It is unlike any other experience. In some cases, it can be a truly life-charging event."

"It sounds amazing." Said Austin.

"As I said before when you first made love to me, the union is more than just sex. It is the life-blood of my species, the way we Asari evolve and grow as a society. That is why we must choose our partners with great care." Said Liara.

"And do you think you've made the right choice?" Austin asked warmly.

"Definitely. Though I never really thought about it before. Not until I met you. I love you so much, Austin. But with all that's happened—Saren, the Geth, and the Reapers— I do not know if we are ready for this." Said Liara.

"I understand, love. These are dark times. Maybe once all this is over..." said Austin.

"I'm glad you understand, my love. There is too much at stake. For now, we need to focus on stopping Saren. I wish it did not have to be that way though. Personally, there is nothing that ever I would ever want more than to truly become one with you." Said Liara.

"Me too, Liara. You gave me purpose again. With you at my side I now have a purpose to keep fighting again. You know, Sha'ira actually foretold me about this. I'm glad to see that she was right." Said Austin.

"Me too. But we all have to make sacrifices." Said Liara.

"Would a kiss be okay though?" Austin asked.

"Absolutely!" Said Liara as she and Austin warmly embraced and pulled each other into a long passionate kiss.

Before they headed back to the Citadel, Austin thought it best to just have a little chat with his crew. Especially Ashley. She needed it. Kaiden's death had hit her hard.

"Commander." She greeted.

"About Lieutenant Alenko, how are you holding up?" Austin asked.
"Can't say I'm better. Sorry for anything I said back there. I just—I don't want any deaths on my hands. And it's my fault." Said Ashley.

"Ash, listen to me. I'm in command of this mission. I had to make the call. Not you. It's not your fault that Kaiden's dead." Said Austin as he put a hand reassuringly on her arm.

"It's funny. I don't have any fear for the Alliance. But when I think of someone dying for me—if you don't mind my asking, how did you deal with the losses of your training unit on Akuse?" Ashley asked.

"Er... Look, Ash. It's not that I don't trust you. It's just that Akuse always brings back the pain. In truth, I never fully healed from that. So I'm afraid I do mind you asking." Austin replied politely.

"I understand, Commander. I'm sorry." Said Ashley.

"It's alright. We'll talk later, Ashley. I hope you feel better soon." Said Austin.

"Shepard, I wanted to thank you." Said Garrus.

"What for, Garrus?" Austin asked.

"For everything. Taking me with you, letting me be part of your team, I've learned a lot. I've thought a lot about what you've told me, about not sacrificing innocents to achieve the goal. About finding the best way through, not just the fastest." Said Garrus.

"I'm glad you think so, Garrus. But words don't mean anything unless you turn them into action. What are you going to do after this?" Austin asked. He had the feeling that Garrus had something to tell him.

"Well I've thought long and hard about this decision and I've decided that instead of going back to C-sec, I'm going to see if I can apply to join the Helldivers." Garrus replied.

Austin was completely stumped by this. He had definitely not expected Garrus to say that.

"Really? Wow! That's unexpected. You sure about that, Garrus?" he asked.

"I'm sure. Don't get me wrong though, I understand why C-sec has all its rules and why it has things done a certain way. But I think that maybe I can put my skills to even better use as a Helldiver. You do the same sort of things, only you have far less restrictions than C-sec and no red tape. Also, instead of just dealing with thugs and criminals, Helldivers actually free human slaves. That's something I think I'd much rather be doing." Said Garrus. He definitely sounded as if he'd made his mind up.

"Well I'm glad to hear that, Garrus. We could use someone of your talents. They'll welcome you with open arms." Said Austin as he shook hands with Garrus.

"Thanks, Shepard. Maybe one day, If I'm lucky, I'll even end up serving under you again." Said Garrus.

"It was an honor working with you, Commander Shepard. Despite the losses, our mission was a success. My superiors will dually honor Lieutenant Alenko for his actions. His sacrifice has earned humanity a great deal of respect from my people." Said Captain Kirrahe.
Kaiden was a hell of a soldier. He knew what the risks where, but he did what he had too." Said Austin.

"Of course. The grim reality that every soldier must accept. Rest assured, Commander, my men and I will not forget what you have accomplished here." Said Kirrahe.


"I appreciate what you did, Wrex. I won't forget it. I understand a lot that it wasn't easy for you to make the choice you made. But trust me, you did the right thing. I'm sure one day you'll see that." Said Austin.

"I hope so. But for now, just make sure it was worth it. Saren has to pay for what he's done, and not just to my people." Said Wrex.

"I promise you, no matter what, I'll make sure that he does." Said Austin.

"It feels like we're getting near the end, doesn't it, Austin? With Saren, I mean." Tali asked. Ever since he'd given her the Geth data, the Quarian had started to call Austin by his first name.

"It won't be much longer. One way or another, it'll all be over soon." Said Austin.

"You'll find the Conduit before he does. I know you will, you have to. And after this is all over, when my pilgrimage ends and I go back to my own people, I'll be proud to say I was a part of it." Said Tali.

"We couldn't have done this without you, Tali." Said Austin.

"You've been good to me. A lot of people treat Quarians like second class citizens. They just want us to go back to our fleet and disappear. But you've treated me just like everyone else on your crew. Like an equal. That means a lot, and it says something about you. Whatever happens, I just want to say thank you for that." Said Tali.

"You know, I'm gonna miss you when you go back to your people, Tali." Said Austin.

"That won't happen for a while yet. I'll be right here any time you need me." Said Tali.

"I forwarded the mission update to the Citadel, Commander. We've got confirmation on those reinforcements. Ambassador Udina wants us to report back to the Citadel. The Council is massing a joint-species fleet to deal with Saren and his Geth." Came Joker's voice over the radio.

"About bloody time! Back to the Citadel, Joker. I want the Normandy at the head of that fleet!" said Austin.

"Good job, Shepard. Thanks to you, the Council's finally taking real action against Saren!" said Udina.

"The Ambassador is correct. If Saren is foolish enough to attack the Citadel—as you believe—we will be ready for him." Said the Asari Councillor.

"Patrols are stationed at every Mass Relay linking Citadel space to the Terminus Systems. The
Helldivers have also been informed and have their fleets monitoring the relays in their territory.” Said the Turian Councillor.

"How many ships are being sent to attack Ilos?" Austin asked.

"Ilos is only accessible through the Mu Relay, deep inside the Terminus Systems, Commander. Your fleets may be welcome there, but ours are not. If we send a fleet in there, the only possible outcome is full-scale war." Said the Salarian Councillor.

"I knew it! I knew they'd do this to me! Why did I ever think that for once they'd be willing to stop fearing the Terminus systems? It seems I'll have to take matters into my own hands. It's time to put my back up plan into motion. But first I need to make them think that I'm letting this go." Austin thought in his head.

"Now is the time for discretion, Commander. Saren's greatest weapon was secrecy. Exposed, he is no longer a threat. This is over!" Said Udina. Fortunately, this worked to Austin's advantage. If the Council saw him agreeing to Udina that would only convince them more.

"I suppose you're right, Ambassador. The whole galaxy knows about him now, so all we need to do is wait for him to stick his head out." Austin lied.

"What? But Shepard! You can't side with them over this!" said Ashley.

"No! Their right, Ash! Our work on this is done!" said Austin. It hurt him to say that to his best friend, but he had no choice.

"We are surprised, but pleased that you at least see it our way, Commander." Said the Asari councillor.

"I'm not an unreasonable man, Councillors. Now I hate to suddenly leave, but I have several urgent assignments that I have to take care off." Said Austin as he and his comrades left.

"No offense, Austin, but have you gone mad?" Ashley hissed so that the Council wouldn't hear her.

"Don't worry, Ash. This is all part of my plan. I knew the Council would do this, but I always have a backup plan." Said Austin as they entered the elevator that would take them down to the wards where they could head back to the Normandy. With the Council now having no chance of hearing them, Austin activated his wrist communicator.

"Joker, have the Normandy ready to leave A.S.A.P! The Council have forced my hand." He said. They were leaving the Citadel.

Getting back to the Normandy involved having to go through the Wards. Along the way they were stopped by a familiar face.

"Hey Shepard. I've got an idea, and I wanted to run it by you." Said Conrad Verner.

"Alright Conrad, but please make it quick. I'm on a tight schedule here for a very important mission.” Said Austin. He would rather they were light years away from the Citadel before the Council found out what he was up to.

"With so many human colonies being attacked, I'm not sure that one Spectre is enough. What if you signed me on as another Spectre?" Conrad suggested.
"Why would you want to be a Spectre, Conrad?" Austin asked.

"Because I want to show the Council what humanity can do, just like you! I'd make a great Spectre! I want to be with you, fighting the good fight, like you did on Elysium during the Skyllian Blitz!" said Conrad excitedly.

"This has got to stop!" Austin thought. He took a moment to think of a good enough answer that would convince Conrad to let it go. He eventually came up with a satisfactory answer.

"I believe you, Conrad. But there's another fight that needs you." He said.


"You know what keeps me going out here? Knowing that people back are keeping humanity strong." Said Austin.

"You- You're right. I just got so caught up in all of it. I wanted to help. I'll go home. Thanks for setting me straight." Said Conrad as he left. Austin watched him go. The Helldiver hoped that would be the last time that he saw Conrad. It wasn't healthy for the man to keep obsessing over him like this.

When they finally made it back, the Normandy was already primed to leave.

"Joker, get us out here!" Austin ordered.


"Just get the Normandy out of here! I'll explain on the way!" Austin ordered again urgently.

Joker didn't need to be told twice. Within seconds, the Normandy disengaged from the Citadel and sped away.

"Okay, we're clear now, Commander. You gonna tell us what's going on? Why aren't we heading to Ilos without those reinforcements we were promised?" Joker asked once they'd cleared the Relay.

"We tried to negotiate but unsurprisingly, the Council refused to help us because they fear we'll cause a war with the Terminus systems." Said Austin.

"You know, you're right. That's not surprising." Said Joker. "So what are we gonna do now? I assume you have a backup plan?"

"I do. Plot a course for these coordinates" Said Austin as he began typing at his omni tool and uploaded the coordinates to Joker.

"The Entrain Abyss? Are you sure about that, Commander? That's inside the Terminus systems. I thought we were heading for the Mu Relay?" Joker asked. He was now puzzled.

"We are. But we can't go to Ilos without reinforcements, but the Council won't help us. Fortunately, I know where we can find help outside of the Council." Said Austin.

Joker checked the coordinates. Now he understood Austin's plan. The Entrain Abyss had recently been taken from pirates and slavers by the Helldivers six months ago. A large portion of their fleet was there right now.
"You're certain they'll listen to us, Commander? Their systems will identify the Normandy as an Alliance ship. Plus what makes you think they'll listen when the Council didn't?" Said Joker.

"They'll listen on me. Plus I'm told that General Zartrack is there right now. He'll help." Said Austin.

"Well, if you're certain, who am I to argue." Said Joker.

"Let me know when the fleets within range. You'll need my help to get landing access." Said Austin as he walked out of the cockpit. Just before he reached the stairs however, Joker voice sounded over the Radio.

"Hey, Commander. The Council's demanding to speak with you. Want me to cut them off?" Joker asked.

"Actually, no. I've got something I want to say to them first. Something I've wanted to say for a long time." Said Austin smugly as he headed into the comm room.

"You're the boss." Said Joker.

The holograms of the Council once again appeared before him. They did not look happy.

"Commander! We demand to know why you have suddenly left the Citadel and why the Normandy is on a course for Terminus territory!" the Asari Councillor yelled.

Austin smiled smugly under his helmet. This was a moment he would treasure forever.

"By refusing to help us, you've left me no choice Councillor. Plus, I believe you did say that I must take whatever steps are necessary to stop it if I believed Sovereign was a threat." He said.

"That does not give you the right to just charge into the Terminus Systems! You are an Alliance Vessel Commander. You'll start an interstellar war!" the Turian Councillor yelled.

"If Saren finds the Conduit, we're all screwed! I won't let you endanger the fate of the entre galaxy over some political bullshit! I'm heading into the Terminus systems to pick up reinforcements for assaulting Ilos. If you don't like it, screw you! I plan to finish what you made me start! I'll stop Saren with or without your help!" Austin shouted.

"I knew even from the beginning you were not fit to be a Spectre! You are hereby stripped of your Spectre status and ordered to return to the Citadel for arrest!" the Turian Councillor yelled angrily.

"Well, since you've just revoked my Spectre status, I don't think that I take orders from you anymore! So goodbye Councillors! Joker, loose this channel!" Austin ordered.

Joker immediately did so and the Council vanished. "That was priceless, Commander! I wish I could've seen their faces!" He said.

Austin also gave deep sigh of relief. It felt good to no longer be a Spectre any more and be a normal Helldiver again.

"Let me know as soon the fleets within range. It's time to take the fight to Saren!" he said.

After about three or four hours, the large Helldiver fleet was in sight. Joker was amazed, and at the same time nervous, of how many ships there where. There where at least six Helldiver carrier cruisers, each of them at least two kilometres long. What made Joker most nervous though, was the massive flagship, the Legacy.
The dreadnought Legacy was the largest ship in the entire galaxy, and the flagship of every Helldiver fleet in existence. At four kilometres long it was easily compared to a large space station with lasers and Thrusters. Joker couldn't deny how intimidated he was by the sight of it. Not even Sovereign was that massive. Austin strode onto the bridge and stood next to Joker. The sight of the fleet made him smile. It was nice to be able to gaze upon a familiar sight after all he had been through.

Two Helldiver atmospheric fighters appeared on either of the Normandy, and then the Legacy itself contacted them.

"Unidentified Alliance Vessel! You are in restricted Helldiver territory! We have you on our screen now and our whole fleet is aware of your presence. Please identify and state your business here!" said the voice.

"This is the SSV Normandy requesting permission to dock. We got a Helldiver aboard. Our business is if with General Zartrack." Said Joker.

There was a brief pause.

"SSV Normandy, we will ask your Helldiver to confirm his identity. If you do not comply, we will use deadly force!" the voice responded.

"They're just as fun as the ones on Noveria." Said Joker sarcastically.

"You can hardly blame them, Joker. We're in the middle of a war after all." Said Austin as he accessed the comm channel. "This is Commander Austin Shepard of Alpha Squad requesting permission to board the Legacy. Authorization code: zero one twelve nine, nine three slash APW slash eighteen."

There was another brief pause.

"Identity confirmed. Code clearance confirmed. SSV Normandy you are clear for docking. Dock in hanger seven. Our fighters will provide escort. Welcome back Commander Shepard." said the voice again.

The Normandy docked in the designated hanger bay and Austin and his team disembarked via the cargo bay doors, including Joker.

"Ah. It's good to be home." Said Austin as he drank in the sight of the Legacy's huge hanger area.

The entire hanger bays where actually joined together and they had no walls. So altogether, it was all just one massive hanger area. The landing bays where separated into sections so that they matched up to the separated hanger bay force fields which kept the oxygen in but allowed ship transition.

"Everyone, welcome to my world." Austin said happily to everyone else.

Even Wrex was lost for words at the sheer size of the massive hanger area. This after all was only one quarter of the ship and it was enormous. As usual, it was abuzz with fighters docking, drop ships being repaired, pilots, engineers and Helldiver soldiers rushing to their stations, and even a few Helldiver squads waiting patiently for their transports to be ready for departure.

As Austin and the crew descended the cargo ramp, they found General Zartrack waiting for them.

"Shepard! Welcome back!" he greeted as he shook hands with his former student.
"It's good to be back, General. I take it you received my message?" Austin asked.

"Indeed. We've also been receiving the mission reports you've been sending us." Said Zartrack.

"Reports? I thought only the Council read those." Said Ashley, confused.

Then Liara figured it out. "Isn't it obvious? Shepard's been filing the mission reports to Helldivers and the Arkanes as well as the Council." She explained.

"Clever girl!" came a British female voice "No wonder Austin's in love with you."

Everyone turned to the source of the noise. Austin however simply smiled and shook his head as he sighed happily. He'd know that voice anywhere, even if he was blindfolded.

Out of the shadow that the Normandy was casting stepped a young woman. She had red hair around the same length as Austin's and was wearing an N7 Defender armour. She also had an N7 Death Mask held under her left arm.

"Always in the right place at the right time, aren't we, Sarah?" Austin asked. He turned around and sure enough, found himself looking into the face of his sister, Sarah Jane Shepard.

"Good to see you too, Austin. It's been too long!" she said.

Both siblings clasped each others hand in the other, almost like an arm wrestle. Liara remembered that some of her reading son the Helldivers. That was their version of a handshake amongst fellow soldiers. They then pulled each other into a tight hug.

"Who's this?" Wrex asked.

"Austin hasn't mentioned me? That is surprising." Said Sarah as she turned to the Normandy's crew. "Allow me to introduce myself. I'm the other Shepard." She said as she gave a slight bow.

Austin chuckled. Ever since he'd become so well known in the Alliance, Sarah always seemed to introduce herself as "The Other Shepard."

"You haven't changed a bit Jane." Said Ashley as she greeted her childhood friend's sister.

"Ashley Madeline Williams. Always a pleasure." Said Sarah as she warmly shook hands with Ashley.

"Still don't get it." Said Wrex, still confused as to who this Alliance soldier was.

"Everyone, this is my sister, Lieutenant Sarah Jane Shepard. Sarah, this is my crew. Urdnot Wrex, Garrus Vakarian, Tali Zorah Nar Rayya and Jeff Moreau. But we all call him Joker." Said Austin as he introduced everyone. He then turned to Liara. "And this, my dear sister, is the lovely Liara T'soni."

"It's an honor to meet you, Lieutenant. I've heard a lot about you." Said Liara as she also greeted Sarah.

"And I've heard a lot about you, Liara. My brother's told me everything about you." Said Sarah. Liara blushed at this.

"I see you've upgraded your armour, Sarah." Said Austin as he indicated to Sarah's new N7 Defender armour.
"A gift from Admiral Hackett. He gave it to me as a present for you being the first human Spectre. It was also partly a reward for my recent mission with a Helldiver squad. I believe you're familiar with them." Said Sarah as she indicated to where she'd been standing earlier. Austin's eyes went wide with shock. Right in front of him, looking overjoyed to see their old Commander, was Austin's old team, Alpha Squad.

"Guys!" he screamed with joy as he ran up to them and embraced every single one of them.

"You look good, Shepard. Nice to see that working as a Spectre for the Council hasn't thinned you out." Said Leena as she patted her Commander on the back.

"Keehlah! As I live and breathe! Leena Vas Penthra!" said Tali as she walked up to the Helldiver Quarian and they warmly greeted one another. "I'm Tali Zorah Nar Rayya. It's an honor to meet you."

The rest of the crew also introduced one another to their own species of Alpha Squad. The Helldiver squad were particularly interested in Liara since they had heard about her relationship with Austin.

Austin meanwhile was discussing the plan with Zartrack.

"So the Arkanes are aware of the situation?" he asked.

"Yes. Unlike those Citadel fools they actually believe you. They're full aware of the situation Ilos and we've already begun mobilizing the fleet for the Mu Relay. We converge on Ilos tomorrow." Said Zartrack.

That was good news for Austin and he breathed a sigh of relief. He had been worried that it would take some persuading. Now though, he wasn't worried at all. Tomorrow, Ilos would be where the battle was won, or lost.

For anyone that might still have difficulty picturing Sarah, she basically has the Default Femshep appearance from ME3. Plus her armor is really designed to look like the female soldier from multiplayer, but with N7 colors.

Please do let me know what you think of the story changes. I always love reviews.
Chapter 20, The Night before Ilos

I do not take credit for any of the pictures used in this chapter.

Chapter 20

The Night before Ilos

The current time was 8:00 pm. The Normandy was currently still being refuelled in the hanger of the Legacy.

Austin had been told by Zartrack to get a lot of rest for the attack on Ilos. However he just couldn't get to sleep. He was nervous and at the same time afraid of what would happen. He was able to at least take strength in the fact that he was not alone in this fight and that he was back with his kin.

As he continued to work on his Helldiver armour for no reason, he couldn't help but feel as though he'd gone down this same path so many times. He stood up for a moment and looked face to face at his own helmet. The armour that had been with him since the very beginning. Despite modifications it had seen over the years, it was still largely the same. As he looked at his helmet it felt like looking in a mirror. Unlike a mirror though, he didn't find the same face staring back at him. He still saw himself, but at the same time it wasn't him. This was his over self. This was the Shepard that everyone mostly knew. Only some knew the real him. The human behind the mask.

"Well, here we go again. I guess it's just destiny that you and I always end up in the same battle." He said to himself. Or rather his armour self.

Austin never considered it crazy to be talking to himself. Sometimes it helped reassure him. Plus, the armour staring back at him that he was talking to represented the other side of the coin. His coin.

"We've come this far. I don't see any reason for us to quit on each other now." He once again said to his still armour. "Ten years ago we started this together, and we're gonna finish it together."

As Austin went back to working on the armour, he felt his beginning to wonder back to the woman of his dreams, Liara. He longed to once again feel Liara's soft flesh under his fingers. Melt into her kisses again. "Stop it, Austin! Get a grip on yourself!" he kept saying in his mind. But it didn't make much difference. He longed to once again talk about his feelings for her, rip her clothes off again and make her scream his name. Feel the warmth of her large breasts. He almost hit himself after that. Fortunately, as Liara had said, Austin was very strong willed, so he maintained control. It was beginning to occur to him that anything could happen on Ilos. This could be the last moments he might have with the beautiful Asari. He now felt the urge to go to her. Comfort her for the coming battle; tell her once again how much he loved her. But at the same time he felt he shouldn't. She would probably not want the distractions. Plus, she was probably sleeping soundly by now. The last thing he wanted was to disturb her.

As he continued to argue with himself, he heard the doors to his quarters open.

"Austin, may I speak with you?" Liara asked quietly.
"Well, I guess that answers my debate for me." Austin thought as he stood up and faced Liara.

"I'm glad you're here, Liara. I was just thinking about you." He said happily. No matter what the situation, her beautiful, young and innocent face always brought a smile to his.

"I have been thinking about you too, my love, and what we are about to face." Said Liara. She too sounded happy at the fact that he had been thinking about her. "I do not know what is going to happen on Ilos. I hope we will stop Saren of course, but, part of me fears we may already be too late."

Austin cupped Liara's face in his hands and looked straight into her blue eyes.

"We're not going to fail, Liara. I promise." He said.

"I know. But please… I am not looking for comfort. Saren might already have the Conduit. It is time to be completely honest with each other. These could be our last moments together. Our last chance to show each other how we feel. I want this to be special." Said Liara as she held gently onto his arms.

"I want this, Liara. I really do. I love you so much. But we don't have to do this. Not unless you're sure." Said Austin. He didn't want to force Liara into anything.

"I have never been more sure of anything in my life. Will you join with me, Austin? Let our bodies and minds unite." Liara asked.

Desire overcame the Helldiver. "I thought you'd never ask!"

Liara pulled Austin into a fiery kiss while he gently caressed her smooth back. His hands then moved to the zipper on her science uniform. Before he could gently ease it down though, Liara stopped him.

"Rip it!" she ordered. "Don't worry, I've got more. Don't be gentle; I want us to go all the way!"

Austin didn't need to be told twice. He once again began to kiss Liara furiously. In the process, he grabbed Liara's clothes and, using all his strength, he ripped them right off. The upper portion of Liara's uniform now lay in shreds. To Austin's delight, she hadn't been wearing her bra. Her nipples were already erect.

"Suck them!" she begged.

Austin picked her up and clamped his mouth down on her breasts. As he was doing that, Liara set about trying to get his uniform off. Since Austin only had one, she didn't want to tear it up. She had mainly let Austin tear hers up because she wanted to be super sexy for him tonight. If this could be their last night together, by the goddess she was going to make the absolute most of it!

Austin continued licking and sucking hard on Liara's gorgeous tits. Liara moaned louder than she had ever moaned before as she felt her nipples grow even more erect from his hard sucking. Eventually, Liara managed to undo the clasps on Austin's uniform and she pulled it off, exposing his strong muscular chest which always turned her on. To be honest though, she most looked forward to see his massive cock. That always got her so horny. In fact she could already feel her Azure beginning to drip as she could feel him hardening under his trousers.

Austin briefly stopped sucking on her large breasts so that he could pull her trousers off as well. He gripped them tightly and roughly slid them off of her firm buttocks. With Liara now fully nude, he returned to sucking and biting at her tits.
"Suck harder! Bite them! I love feeling your tongue on my boobs!" Liara moaned as she continued to ruffle his hair.

Austin began to start stepping backwards to wards the bed as he still held Liara up and continued to lick and bite at her breasts. Finally he felt his legs touch the side and he allowed himself to fall onto the soft mattress. Liara sat up and began to slide Austin's trousers off roughly. His huge erection was freed within the minutes.

With both lovers now completely divested of their clothes they readied themselves for the highly anticipated meld.

"You're sure you truly want this?" Austin asked.

"Austin, just stop asking me and Embrace Eternity!" said Liara.

What happened next for both of them was unlike anything they had ever experienced before. Liara's eyes went black as she initiated the union. Austin felt his entire mind melt into hers. Suddenly he didn't feel alone anymore. Liara was now with him, inside his head. He now hardly knew where he ended and she began. He could feel her mind slowly pushed into his, his memories becoming hers, their nervous systems intertwining into one. No experience in his entire life even came close to this. It was true about what Liara had said. Two truly do become one.

With both their minds melded, Liara then decided to show Austin how the union allowed them to share pleasure as well. She reached behind her and grabbed his cock. She stroked it slowly but tightly to make sure it grew to its fullest length. Thanks to the Union, it grew rock hard and longer than it ever had before. Austin moaned slightly as she stroked him. Liara joined in as well since she was also able to feel what she was doing to Austin. She then held it in line with her glistening, dripping Asari pussy.

"Fuck me with your big cock!" she moaned.

You really know what I like, don't you?" Austin said through their meld.

"I'll return the favour later." Liara responded back.

What really impressed Austin was that the Union also allowed them to communicate with each other through their minds without speaking.

Liara pounded herself down onto his bulging shaft and screamed as the pleasure she felt was doubled by the Union and she could also feel the pleasure that Austin was feeling. She did admit that it felt a little weird to have the feeling of having a cock, but the massively erotic thoughts that it gave her overwhelmed the strangeness.

Austin started off gentle and slid in and out of her. He really was surprised at how much of Liara he filled up. Because of the Union, he'd managed to grow even larger, harder and longer than he'd ever done. Even when he'd masturbated a few times, it hadn't grown anywhere near this large.

"You put even Krogan to shame. Your dick's absolutely enormous!" Liara screamed as Austin continued to hit her G-spot over and over again, pounding even harder as he slowly sped up.

"Been doing some more research I see." Said Austin as he began to see some of Liara's memories of doing research on non-human sex as well. As the couple's pleasure increased to unimaginable levels, visions, images and memories started to flood each other's minds. Through Liara's mind he saw millions of beautiful Prothean ruins, the stunning landscapes of other planets, visions of the Asari home world, Thessia, and even some memories of Benezia when Liara was still a child.
A sudden realization hit him as he saw these memories. Some of them had happened before even his mother and father where born. That was spooky. Still, he didn't mind at all.

"Is that your mother? Wow, she looks so young." He said through the meld.

"She was still in her Matron stage at the time." Said Liara through her mind. She refused to stop her screams and moans of pleasure as Austin continued to pump his cock in and out of her leaking pussy. Austin would need to remember to change the sheets after this.

"It's funny. She's like 100 years younger at the time, but her breasts are exactly the same." Said Austin. He couldn't help it. That however gave Liara an idea.

"If you love them that much, perhaps I should get mine enlarged." She suggested.

However, Liara had thought that Austin knew what she meant but he didn't and he misinterpreted it.

"No, Liara. Your tits are perfect. If you get enlargements they won't feel the same because they'll be fake," He said. To prove his point, he brought his hands up to her breasts and began to squeeze and fondle them.

"Oh, sorry, Austin. I thought you knew." Liara apologized.

Despite this though, they didn't stop their hard, lustful sex. Austin just continued pounding into her Azure while she continued to ride him.

"Knew what?" Austin asked. Now he was puzzled.

"Watch this!" Liara teased as she winked at him.

She took her hands away from his chest and brought them up to her breasts. She removed Austin's hands and placed them on her hips. She then groped her tits tightly and began to concentrate. Her whole body suddenly glowed as her biotics flared into life. Then, to Austin's utter shock, her breasts slowly started to grow. His mouth hung open and he was left completely speechless as they continued to enlarge at an alarming rate. After a few seconds, Liara broke her concentration and her breasts stopped growing. Austin was beginning to doubt whether he was dreaming or not. In just 5 seconds, Liara had enlarged her breasts from the maiden stage size all the way to Matriarch stage size.

"Jesus Christ! I… What… How the hell did you do that?" he stuttered.

Liara laughed. The sheer shock of seeing her tits grow had caused Austin to stop pounding into her. She didn't mind though. It would only be temporary.

"It's a very secret biotic talent unique only to Asari." She said. "It allows us to enlarge or grow certain parts of our bodies. In this case, my boobs."

"Am I even awake now?" Austin asked.

"Of course you are. These are real. This isn't a mind trick. Feel them." Said Liara. She found Austin's reaction hilarious.

Austin slowly reached up and began to squeeze at Liara's massive breasts. They were just as firm and just as soft as they had been before. They never even gave the faintest sign that they were sagging.
"Wow!" he managed to say.

"It can only be done during a Union though. Once the connection is eventually broken they'll revert back to normal." Said Liara. "But we still have several hours and the whole night to ourselves. How about we introduce these bad girls to your cock?" she suggested.

"First things first though, I need to finish what I've started." Said Austin as he indicated to his still hard cock that was currently throbbing inside Liara.

"Go on, Austin! Finish fucking me! Suck my boobs while you do!" Liara pleaded as Austin resumed his hard and deep thrusts and she started to moan again. She pulled Austin's face right up to her Matriarch sized breasts and forced him to suck on them. Austin put his arms around Liara's back and hugged her tightly so that he could force himself even closer to her. Liara joined in by arching her back.

"I hope one day you'll be using these to feed the babies." Austin thought in his mind to Liara as he sucked and bit at her nipples.

"One day, my love! One day! Oh goddess, suck them harder! Keep fucking me!" Liara screamed.

"I'm getting close now! Austin groaned.

"Cum in me! Paint me with your cum! Shoot it all into me!" Liara moaned as she too neared her climax.

Thanks to the Union they both came at the same time. Juices squirted from Liara's pussy and massive spurts of cum shot out of Austin's cock and into Liara's womb. He was glad at least that there was no risk of pregnancy. Asari didn't reproduce in the same way.

As they both came down from the climax, Liara caught a very brief glimpse of a memory of Austin having sex with another Asari and a human female at the same time. Austin saw that too. Liara recognized them both from Alpha Squad.

"Oh? You had sex with two of your squad mates?" she asked cheekily.

"That was an accident, Liara." Austin replied defensively. "Sandra and I had a bit too much to drink that night. It was mostly Alaara's doing. That Asari is a sex maniac."

"I don't blame you, Austin. Plus, that was before we even met. So I'm not saying that you're unfaithful." Said Liara.

"I know. Now, I believe you wanted to give your new breasts a test run?" Austin asked.

"Indeed. I've also got something I'd like to try." Said Liara as she dismounted from him and allowed his still hard beef stick to slide out. She then knelt down in front of it and grasped it tightly in both her hands.

"Now don't distract me, Austin." She said.

To Austin's utter surprise, Liara once again glowed with biotics. Before he could say anything, his head was thrown back and his penis began to throb. His heart rate sped up and his cock now started stiffening harder, thicker, and longer. His balls tightened and throbbed while some pre-cum seeped out of the head, pre self-lubricating the coming enjoyment. When he looked back at Liara, he was shocked to see his cock had now reach an unimaginable 15 inches and 4 inches wide.
"You have got to be joking!" he said.

"I enlarged my tits for you. It's only fair you do the same for me. I forgot to mention that we can do it to other species as well.

"In that case, it's all yours, Liara!" said Austin.

Liara smiled and immediately plunged Austin's huge cock into her mouth. As she sucked greedily she swirled her tongue around the bulging mushroom head. Austin moaned and moved his hands down to massage her head crest. As he did this, Liara took both her massive, Matriarch sized boobs in her hands and wrapped them around the rest of his cock that she couldn't fit into her mouth.

"Bloody hell! Liara, you are the best in the entire galaxy!" Austin moaned as he felt his dick rubbing against soft, firm flesh and being licked by such a skilled tongue. Liara made sure to keep moaning and humming her approval as she licked all over the head of the dick that was sandwiched between her full milky globes. She then settled into a rhythm of moving her breasts up and down Austin's cock in time with her head bobbing up and down on him. Thanks to the Union still being up she could quickly feel the cum creeping up her boyfriend's shaft. Spurred on by this, the Asari squeezed Austin even harder into the valley between her breasts as he rubbed the organ, slick with her vagina's natural lubricant, between the soft mountains. Certain that his dick was about to erupt, Liara let it pop out of her mouth.

"Be a good a boy and finish it off for me will you, Austin? I want to see you touch yourself!" Liara ordered.

Austin smiled and began stroking himself as he watched Liara continue to move her massive bust up and down the lower part of his massive shaft. Liara watched her boyfriend's cock grow just a tiny bit larger before it finally erupted and massive amounts of cum shot out and bathed her.

"Goddess!" she moaned as she licked most of the cum off her face. The rest of it, she just left there. She wanted to get cleaned up but she refused to break the Union.

Austin then watched as Liara got on all fours.

"I think you know what I'm going to ask." She said seductively.

"In the rear, huh? Nice!" said Austin as he positioned himself behind Liara. "Are you sure about this though? It's your first anal and you've made my cock even larger."

"Please? I want us to make the most of tonight!" Liara begged.

"Alright. If you say so." Austin said with a smile.

Austin guided his throbbing rod forward, pushing against the hole. Not deterred by attempting the impossible fit his shaft into her three quarter inch hole, Austin pushed harder and harder.

"Oh Goddess!" Liara screamed as she felt the massive shaft that she had created slowly plunge into her tight asshole. She squeezed against the sheets of the bed. The nerve endings around and in her ass felt as if they were on fire as Austin oozed his thick shaft in. "Ah! I can feel the veins in me!"

Austin was challenged here. He failed to read weather or not this was pleasurable for her or not. So he asked. "You okay, love?"

"Ok? I want it all!" Liara moaned.
Austin laughed and sped up his thrust into her. The tighter and tighter it got the more definite the 
blood supply to his shaft was cut off. His head thumped and drummed within her and the veins in 
this impossibly hard and thick cock bulged creating ridges in Liara's tight hole. He finally buried 
himself in her, he could feel the muscles surrounding his cock clenching and relaxing at the intrusion. 
He gripped her waist tightly and pulled back, pushing back into her relatively easily. He began to 
pick up a better pace, her ass stretched to accommodate him, holding him in a tight vice grip. He 
picked up more speed, slamming into her now, his balls slapping against her sobbing pussy.

"Goddess, Austin! I'm gonna explode!" Liara screamed. There was no way she could hold out much 
longer. Liara cried out as the orgasm hit her, she collapsed slightly but Austin held her up, both arms 
grabbing her massive Matriarch sized boobs. Every nerve in her body pushed into overload and she 
cursed, "Fuck!" The sensation of her love squeezing her breasts and plunging his cock inside her ass 
drove her wild. Austin released her and she collapsed onto the bed, panting wildly.

"One last fuck?" Austin asked through the Union.

Liara nodded and turned over to lie on her back. "Do it this way. Nice and deep! I want you all the 
way in!" she said as she pointed to her still dripping pussy.

Austin climbed on top of Liara. He made sure to keep stroking himself a few times so that his 
errection didn't soften. There was no way he was going to ruin it now. Not while they were so near 
the end. He grabbed hold of her waist and pulled her forward, impaling her on his cock. He moved 
his hands to the underside of her knees and held there, as he thrust into her.

"Ahh! Yes!" Liara moaned as he pushed particularly deep into her.

The Helldiver leaned forward and stared at her enormous breasts for a moment. He kissed the valley 
between her bust, before taking one of her hard nipples into his mouth, biting and licking around it, 
teasing her areola with his skilled tongue.

"Ohhhh..." Liara melted into him, her head tilting away, allowing him more access. She could 
already feel the orgasm building up again, as Austin quickly pounded into her. Wet slapping echoed 
around the room as he connected with her soaked azure.

"Liara." Austin grunted as he buried his face in her neck. He felt her walls contract around him, 
seemingly milking the last of his semen, her breasts thrusting into the air as they both came.

The Asari brought her right hand into her mouth to bite on it, preventing her from screaming out. 
"Goddess yes!" she moaned through gritted teeth, her breathing was ragged and her thighs spasmed 
out of control, her toes curling madly. She weakly gasped as the euphoria slowly wore off; her whole 
body came down from ecstasy.

With the last of their energy exhausted, the two lovers got comfortable and began to drift off to sleep.

"I love you, Liara T'soni." Said Austin.

"I love you too, Austin Shepard." Said Liara.

Austin and Liara felt themselves slowly wake up. The whole of their sleep had been filled with 
nothing pleasure since they had found out that the Union allowed them to share the same dream with 
one another. Liara was even beginning to think that it since the Union left a few permanent pieces 
forever in both partners, it could be possible that they would still be able to communicate with each 
other telepathically.

The Union finally ended as the two lovers woke up. Liara felt her breasts return to their normal size
and Austin felt his cock shrink back to normal as well. Even without the extra size though, he was still hard from the dreams. He looked own at Liara and they both smiled at each other.

"By the Goddess! That was incredible Austin." She said. Still a little tired from last night.

"You were incredible, Liara." Said Austin. His expression then curved into a naughty smile. "Ready for round two?"

"Come here!" Liara answered.

Just as they started kissing though, Joker's voice came over the radio.

"Five minutes E.T.A to the Mu Relay." He said.

Both Austin and Liara groaned.

"Of all the moments." Austin sighed as he pulled back the covers and got out of bead. He began putting his suit mesh on. Liara did the same and put her trousers back on. Due to her original lab coat being ruined she would have to borrow one of Austin's shirts until she got her spare uniform on.

"Well, I guess this is it. Are you ready?" Austin asked as he finished zipping up his mesh.

"After that, I'm ready for anything. But I just want to say, whatever happens on Ilos, I just want to say… thank you. For everything." Said Liara.

"I love you." Said Austin as he embraced Liara and kissed her one last time.

"I love you too." Liara replied.

Whatever happened, they would fight together, as lovers.

There you have it! Hope your keyboards aren't too sticky.

Also I hope that the growth and enlargement thing wasn't overdone. It just came to me while I was writing this and I thought it would be an extremely hot thing to do with biotics. If you say that it's good enough in reviews, then I'll reuse it in future stories.

Next chapter: Assault on Ilos. I plan for that one to end in a cliffhanger since right at the very end, we meet the other villain that i've created specially for the story. All i was say is that it's a special type of Husk. I have however left clues in the Eden prime chapter. If anyone has been clever enough to figure it out you're welcome to ask me in a PM.

See you soon! Please leave reviews!
Here it is! What it's all been building up too.

Nothing more for to say, other than enjoy!

Chapter 21

The Mystery of Ilos

This was it. This was what it had all been building up to. The Mu Relay was within sight. The hanger bay of the Legacy was packed with Helldiver soldiers. Austin, Sarah, Alpha Squad and the rest of the Normandy's crew where currently stationed outside the Normandy's cargo bay ramp. On a high balcony in the hanger, General Zartrack stood overlooking the soldiers.

"I'll bet he's gonna do one of his speeches again." Said Dash.

"When has he never?" Ventra replied.

Sure enough, Zartrack activated a loud speaker and began to address the other Helldivers. All the Helldivers in the hanger turned to the General.

"Alright! This is it! Now you all know me and you all know why we're here, so I'll just say this as simple as I can. If it's our time to die, it's our time. All I ask is, if we have to give our lives to stop Saren and the Geth, then we give 'em hell before we do!" he said.

At the mention of the phrase "Give 'em hell!" everyone in the hanger bay cheered. The phrase had become well known as a motivational sign among the Helldivers.

"Now, report to your battle stations and prepare for impact! Let's take the fight to them!" said Zartrack.

All the Helldivers in the hanger began departing to their drop ships and others went to their fighters.

"Yeah! We're gonna fight, and we're gonna win!" Dash cheered.

The rest of Alpha Squad, along with Austin, all cheered with him and did a massive high five. Dash always did have the most enthusiastic attitude out of all of them. He was never afraid to speak his mind.

"God, I've missed you guys." Said Austin happily.

The Normandy was the first ship to leave the docks. Since only the Normandy had a stealth drive, the plan was for Austin and his team to sneak past the Geth ships and be the first to touch down on Ilos so that they could at least catch Saren. As for the Geth, the Helldivers would deal with them.

"Once you enter Ilos' atmosphere, we'll clear the relay and attack the Geth fleets." Came Zartrack's voice over the radio.

"Roger that, General." Said Austin "Good luck, sir."

"Give'em hell, Shepard!" said Zartrack.
The radio ended and the Normandy headed for the Relay.

"Ready, Commander?" asked Joker.

"Let's do it!" said Austin.

Once again, the Normandy was engulfed by blue energy and was shot forward at light speed. Finally, the energy dispersed. Before them lay Ilos, and with it, a Geth fleet. Sovereign though was nowhere to be seen.

"Commander? We've got company." Said Joker.

"Have their sensors picked us up yet?" Liara asked.

"Stealth systems are engaged. Unless we get close enough for a visual, they won't have any idea we're here." Joker replied.

"Picking up some strange readings from the planet's surface." Said Pressly.

"Take us down, Joker. Lock in on the coordinates." Austin ordered.

"Negative on that, Commander. The nearest landing zone's two klicks away." Said Pressly.

"We'll never make it in time on foot. Get us something closer!" said Ashley.

"There is nowhere closer! I've looked!" Pressly retaliated.

"Then just send us in the drop ship!" said Alaara.

"Too risky! Saren probably has some of his Geth watching the sky. The Hellhound isn't fast enough!" said Pressly.

"We've got no choice then. Drop us in the Mako." Austin ordered.

"You'd need at least a hundred meters of open terrain to pull off a drop like that. The most I can find near Saren is twenty." Said Pressly.

"Twenty meters? No way we can make a drop in there." Said Ashley.

"Ashley's right. If we try a stunt like that, we'll be killed!" Sarah agreed.

"We have to try." Said Liara.

"Find another landing zone!" said Ashley.

"There is no other landing zone!" Pressly shouted back.

"The descent angle's too steep!" Tali agreed.

"It's our only option!" said Liara.

"It's not an option! It's a suicide run! We don't-" Ashley attempted to say. But she was interrupted by Joker.

"I can do it." He said.

"Joker?" Austin asked. He had to be sure that the pilot knew what he was doing.
"I can do it." Joker repeated.

"Everyone, gear up and head down to the Mako. I'm not taking any chances with this mission. No one's being left behind here." Austin ordered.

All of Alpha Squad and the crew went down to the Cargo bay. Austin turned back to Joker.

"Joker – drop us right on top of that bastard!" he said.

Saren, the Terror Geth and his troops were making their way towards the Conduit. It would not be long now. The path ahead was clear and Saren knew that the Council where too cowardly to send a fleet after him. Suddenly he heard a noise in the sky. He and the Terror Geth looked up to see the SSV Normandy heading right for them.

"You two, keep moving!" the Terror Geth ordered to the last two Geth soldiers.

"Inside. Now!" Saren ordered.

All the Geth that hadn't been chosen to stay behind and guard the door did as they were ordered and quickly moved inside the bunker. Both Saren and the Terror Geth watched as the Mako shot out of the Normandy.

"Seal the doors!" the Terror Geth ordered.

The Mako landed hard against the ground and skidded to a stop. They were already too late though. By the time the rover's occupants began crawling out, the doors had sealed.

"So the council sent Shepard after all. Surprising." Said Saren as the Geth resumed their march to the Conduit.

"It won't matter. By the time they make it through, it will already be too late." Said the Terror Geth.

"Then they will die like the rest."

"Nevertheless, have the Tunneler ready." Said Saren.

The Mako skidded to a halt just as the bunker sealed itself. With the path blocked, Austin, Alpha Squad and the rest of the team clambered out. Austin was now quite glad, and at the same time impressed, that the Mako had enough seats. They all walked up to the doors.

"We have to get inside this bunker before Saren finds the Conduit. There is no way we're getting past that door with brute force." Said Liara.

"Saren found some way to open it. There must be some kind of security override somewhere in this complex." Said Wrex.

"Then we will have to find some way to get it up and running again." Said Liara.

The entire group then took a moment to look at the sights that Ilos offered. Austin couldn't help but feel that Ilos had a very odd nostalgic feel to it. Alpha Squad didn't seem to show much of a reaction. But then again, they were all wearing helmets. Liara though seemed speechless at the sight.

"I never dreamed I would actually find Ilos." She said.

"It feels wrong to me that we're here. Millions of Protheans died here thousands of years ago after
"We'll worry about disturbing dig sites later, guys." Said Austin. He then spoke into his wrist communicator. "General, this is Shepard, do you copy?"

"We read you Shepard. What's you're status?" came Zartrack's reply.

"We're on Ilos. But Saren's sealed himself in a bunker. We're working on getting it open." Austin replied.

"Copy that. We're clearing the Relay now. Once we've dealt with the Geth fleets, we'll deploy our forces. You're gonna need all the help you can get against Saren." Said Zartrack.

Austin ended the transmission and took out his rifle. All the others did the same.

"Come on. We've got some Geth to kill and a door control to find." He said.

"You haven't changed a bit, Commander." Said Kraan.

The mere second they left the Mako, they ran into Geth, and there were a lot of them. Fortunately, the Geth hadn't counted on there being so many of them. Within minutes, they had managed to gun down all the Geth and they proceeded further through Ilos. The next few hours or so was filled with nothing but gunfights as more and more Geth tried to stand in their way. They failed, obviously.

After a very long time, they finally reached what looked like some kind of control panel for the bunker doors. Austin walked up to the console and accessed it. After a while of using his suit to access the controls, he managed to get access.

"That got it. The path should be clear now." He said.

"Come. Saren already has a head start. We have to go find him before he reaches the Conduit." Said Liara with a real sense of urgency in her voice.

"Unless he's already found it, in which case we're walking into a trap." Said Wrex.

"Don't be so negative, Wrex. If he had this… Conduit, we would know by now." Said Sarah. The N7 marine was doing her best to diffuse the tension. Like her brother, she preferred to focus on the positives rather than the negatives.

Austin turned around to re-join the small army.

"Shepard is right. It is a chance we shall have to take." Said Garrus.

"Which Shepard, Garrus? There's two of us." Austin asked in a sarcastic tone. He hated it when this happened.

"Sorry… I meant your sister." Said Garrus.

"Why don't you just use his first name?" Sarah asked.


As the group turned to leave though, some sort of hologram flashed into life.

"Hold on! Something's happening." Said Alaara.
Austin turned around and looked at the hologram. It wasn't clear what it was meant to be. It looked very badly damaged and extremely old.

"Too late… unable to… invading fleets… no escape…" he heard it say.

"Sounds like some kind of message. But that isn't any language I've ever heard." Said Leena.

"It is probably in Prothean. This recording must be 50,000 years old. No wonder we cannot understand it." Said Liara.

Austin as puzzled by this. It had been plain English to him. Was he hearing things?

"The message is all broken up but I recognize some of the words. It's a warning against the Reaper invasion." He said.

"Wait, you're saying you can understand it?" Ashley asked.

"How's that possible?" Ventra asked.

"Of course! Between the beacons and the Cipher, an understanding of the Prothean language would've been… transferred into your mind." Said Liara.

"I'm beginning to wonder what you've been doing with my brother." Said Sarah. But she meant it as a joke. Some of Alpha Squad giggled slightly. The sense of humour probably ran in the family.

"Not safe… seek refuge… inside the archives…" the message continued.

"What's it saying? Can you make out anything useful?" Tali asked.

"Fought Reapers… The Citadel… overwhelmed… only hope… act of desperation… the Conduit… all is lost!" the message finished.

"It said something about the Conduit, but it's too degraded to help I'm afraid. We should go." Said Austin.

A quick elevator ride took the group back up the level where the Mako had landed. Sure enough, the bunker doors had now opened. Then Austin's radio crackled into life.

"Commander, do you copy?" came Zartrack's voice.

"I read you. What's the situation, General?" Austin replied.

"The Geth fleet orbiting Ilos has been dealt with. We're dropping troops down on the surface. We've got your location on sensors, so heads up! Here comes the cavalry!" said Zartrack.

As the Arkane finished speaking, the sound of engines could be heard. The group looked to the sky and was welcomed by the sight of Helldiver drop ships and gunships descending. Some were carrying rovers, others carrying the crab walker tanks and others just carrying soldiers. As they touched down, Zartrack disembarked from the main gunship.

"Good timing, General." Said Austin.

"We're not about to let you have all the fun." Said Zartrack.

"So, who votes we take the vehicles into the creepy underground bunker?" Liara asked in joking
"Good idea. All this firepower will come in handy." Said Wrex as he looked at one of the crap walkers.

With the Mako leading, the large convoy of Helldiver rovers proceeded into the tunnels. All around them was the massive Prothean architecture of Ilos. Despite that they weren't here under the best of circumstances, Liara was still speechless at the sight.

"I have spent my life studying the Protheans. But I never dreamed I would discover anything like this. This bunker might have been the last refuge of their entire species. Just imagine what mysteries it might hold. Imagine what secrets it might reveal." She said.

"Hey! Try to remember why we're here, Liara. Saren, the Conduit, the fate of the entire galaxy?" Sarah reminded the Asari.

"I am sorry, Sarah. I was swept up in the moment. I just hope we have the opportunity to study this place in detail after this is done." Said Liara.

"I'm sure we will, love." Said Austin. He didn't really care now whether the crew, his squad or his sister knew about his relationship with Liara.

"I would've thought Saren would've set some kind of trap or ambush for us. They've must've been in too much of a hurry." Said Wrex.

"Or we just have yet to run into it." Said Sandra.

The convoy moved deeper and deeper into the underground bunker. It was like a massive Prothean designed canyon. They couldn't help but notice the strange capsules sticking out of the walls.

"What are all those things on the wall? Some kind of containment?" Wrex asked.

"They look like stasis pods. The Protheans probably tried to keep themselves alive through cryogenic freezing. Something must've gone wrong. This bunker became their tomb. The pods are dead as well as anyone inside." Said Liara. There was hint of sadness in her voice.

"All of them? There must be hundreds of those pods." Alaara asked.

"What was Saren expecting to find here? There's nothing left but corpses." Ventra asked rhetorically.

After a long drive further through the Ilos canyons, the convoy did eventually find a few Geth. However they weren't much and where gunned down easily. Suddenly, they then found themselves blocked by some sort of orange shield. The convoy stopped.

"What is happening?" Liara asked.

"It's a trap! Saren must've set and ambush!" came Zartrack's voice.

However no Geth tried to attack them. They were all alone.

"I do not think Saren is behind this." Said Liara.

Austin couldn't shake the feeling that Liara was right. This was something else. He and the rest of the team clambered out of the Mako. A few of the Helldivers, along with Zartrack, did the same. One soldier bravely touched the barrier. It didn't hurt him. But at the same time, it didn't let him through.
Austin looked back and noticed that the way back was blocked too.

"Looks like we're stuck here." Said Zartrack. "No way will our weapons have any effect on those barriers.

Austin then noticed a door near the barrier. Zartrack noticed it too.

"Guard the convoy and keep the engines running! We'll be back." Zartrack ordered to the other Helldivers.

A brief elevator ride found the group in a large open room. In front of them was the same hologram that they had seen earlier. Austin walked up to it.

"You are not Prothean. But you are not machine, either. This eventuality was one of many that was anticipated. This is why we sent our warning through the beacons." It said.

"Looks like some kind of VI program. Pretty badly damaged." Said Tali.

"I do not sense the taint of indoctrination upon any of you. Unlike the other that passed recently. Perhaps there is still hope." Said the hologram.

"Wait a minute. How come we can understand it now? Why isn't it speaking the Prothean language?" Ashley asked.

"I have been monitoring your communications since you arrived at this facility. I have translated my output into a format you will comprehend. My name is Vigil. You are safe here, for the moment. But that is likely to change. Soon, nowhere will be safe." The hologram replied.

"Are you some kind of artificial intelligence program?" Austin asked.

"I am an advanced non-organic analysis system with personality imprints from Ksad Ishan, chief overseer of the Ilos research facility." Vigil replied.

"Why did you bring us here?" Zartrack asked.

"You must break a cycle that has continued for millions of years. But to stop it, you must understand or you will make the same mistakes we did. The Citadel is the heart of your civilization and the seat of government. As it was with us, and as it has been with every civilization that came before us. But the Citadel is a trap. The station is actually an enormous Mass Relay. One that links to dark space, the empty void beyond the galaxy's horizon. When the Citadel relay is activated, the Reapers will pour through. And all you know will be destroyed." Vigil explained.

"How's that possible? How come nobody ever noticed the Citadel was an inactive Mass Relay?" Sarah asked.

"The Reapers are careful to keep the greatest secrets of the Citadel hidden. That is why they created a species of seemingly benign organic caretakers." Said Vigil.

"Wait a minute. You're talking about the keepers?" Sandra asked, a hint of shock in her voice.

"The keepers maintain the station's most basic functions. They enable any species that discovers the Citadel to use it without fully understanding the technology. Reliance on the keepers ensures no other species will ever discover the Citadel's true nature. Not until the relay is activated and the Reapers invade." Said Vigil.
"How do the Reapers survive out in dark space?" Dash asked.

"We have only theories. The researchers here came to believe the Reapers enter prolonged states of inactivity to conserve energy. This allows them to survive the thousands and thousands of years it takes for organic civilization to rebuild itself. But in this state, they are vulnerable. By retreating beyond the edges of the galaxy, they ensure no one will accidentally discover them. They keep their existence hidden until the Citadel Relay is activated." Said Vigil.

"This means Reapers can wipe out the Council and the entire Citadel fleet in a single surprise attack!" said Austin.

"That was our fate. Our leaders were dead before we even realized we were under attack. The Reapers seized control of the Citadel and through it, the mass relays. Communication and transportation across our empire were crippled. Each star system was isolated, cut off from the others. Easy prey for the Reaper fleets. Over the next decades, the Reapers systematically obliterated our people. World by world, system by system, they methodically wiped us out." Said Vigil.

"The war was lost. If you had surrendered, they might have let you live." Said Liara.

"No offer of surrender was ever given. Our enemy had a single goal: the extinction of all advanced organic life. Through the Citadel, the Reapers had access to all our records, maps, census data. Information is power, and they knew everything about us. Their fleets advanced across every settled region of the galaxy. Some worlds were utterly destroyed. Others were conquered, their populations enslaved. These indoctrinated servants became sleeper agents under Reaper control. Taken in as refugees by other Protheans, they betrayed them to the machines. Within a few centuries, the Reapers had killed or enslaved every Prothean in the galaxy. They were relentless, brutal and absolutely thorough." Said Vigil.

"You said we were brought here for a reason. Tell us what we need to do." Said Austin.

"The Conduit is the key. Before the Reapers attacked, we Protheans were on the cusp of unlocking the mysteries behind Mass Relay technology. Ilos was a top secret facility. Here, researchers worked to create a small-scale version of a Mass Relay. One that linked directly to the Citadel: the hub of the Relay network.

"So the Conduit isn't a weapon. It is a back door onto the Citadel!" said Liara.

"How did this manage to stay hidden?" Garrus asked.

"All official records of our project were destroyed in the initial attack on the Citadel. While the Prothean Empire came crashing down, Ilos was spared. We severed all communication with the outside and our facility went dark. The personnel retreated underground into these archives. To conserve resources, everyone was put into Cryogenic stasis. I was programmed to monitor the facility and wake the staff when the danger had passed. But the genocide of an entire species is a long, slow process. Years passed. Decades, centuries. The Reapers persisted. And my energy reserves were dwindling." Said Vigil.

"You should have fought!" Austin objected.

"We were a few hundred against a galactic invasion fleet. Our only hope was to remain undetected. I began to disable the life support of non-essential personnel. First support staff, then security. One by one, their pods were shut down to conserve energy. Eventually, only the stasis pods of the top scientist remained active. Even these were in danger of failing when the Reapers finally retreated back through the Citadel Relay. " Said Vigil.
"There were hundreds of stasis pods out there! You just shut them down? You killed them?" Liara asked in horror.

"This outcome was not completely unforeseen. My actions were a result of contingency programming entered on my creation." Vigil replied defensively.

"I bet they didn't tell the "non-essential" staff about this contingency." Said Ashley.

"I saved key personnel. When the Reapers retreated, the top researchers were still alive. My actions are the only reason any hopes remains. When the researchers woke, they realized the Prothean species was doomed. There were only a dozen individuals left, far too few to sustain a viable population. Yet they vowed to find some way to stop the Reapers from returning. A way to break the cycle forever. And they knew the keepers were the key." Said Vigil.

"I still don't fully understand. Why is Saren trying to find the Conduit?" Austin asked.

"The Conduit gives him access to the Citadel and the keepers. The keepers are controlled by the Citadel. Before each invasion, a signal is sent through the station compelling the keepers to activate the Citadel Relay. After decades of feverish study, the scientists discovered a way to alter this signal. Using the Conduit, they gained access to the Citadel and make the modifications. This time, when Sovereign sent the signal to the Citadel, the keepers ignored it. The Reapers are trapped in dark space." Vigil explained.

"Saren must have some plan to undo that." Said Kraan.

"The one you call Saren will use the Conduit to bypass the Citadel's defences. Once inside, he will transfer control of the station to Sovereign. Sovereign will override the Citadel's systems and manually open the Relay. And the cycle of extinction will begin again." Said Vigil.

"There has to be some way to stop them." Said Austin.

"There's a data file in my console. Take a copy when you go. When you reach the Citadel's master control unit, upload it to the station. It will corrupt the Citadel's security protocols and give you temporary control over the station. It might give you a chance against Sovereign." Said Vigil.


"Through the Conduit. Follow Saren. He will lead you to your destination." Said Vigil.

"Then we have no time to lose! Saren's got enough of a head start. Grab that data file and let's go!" said Austin.

Before they could turn to leave though, Liara stopped him.

"Austin, wait! Are you sure? Who knows who long Vigil will be here. Even now the projection is weak. This might be our only chance to speak with it, our only link to the knowledge of the Protheans. It is the opportunity of a life time." She said.

Liara did have a point.

"It might know something. Alright, ask Vigil what you want, but make it quick!" he said to her.

After a few long minutes or so, Liara had heard all she wanted from Vigil.
"The one you call Saren has not reached the Conduit. Not yet. There is still hope if you hurry." Said Vigil as it disappeared and the group headed back to the Convoy.

Sure enough, the barrier was now down. With no time to lose, the convoy sped through the Prothean canyons. All the while though, Dash couldn't help but enjoy it all. The race against time sense, on a mission to save the galaxy, and the fact that they were near the epic climax. At one point he couldn't help but chant "Helldiver victory!"

As the convoy neared the Conduit, more and more Geth were appearing. As they finished the last wave however, the whole ground started to shake and rumble. At the very back of the convoy, 5 massive mechanical tentacles suddenly burst out of the ground, obliterating the rear of the colony and sending others crashing into the huge chasm left by the arms.

"What the hell's going on back there?" Zartrack shouted into his comm.

There's something back here! We can't…" a soldier replied over the radio, but it was cut off before he could continue. Using the turret on his tank, Zartrack looked back. All he could see however where the remains of several destroyed rovers tanks and crab walkers. The convoy made a turn and there, right in front of them, was the Conduit. True enough, it was just a smaller Mass Relay.

"There, the Conduit! It's incredible!" said Liara as she admired the sight.

"I'm afraid we don't have time to admire the view, Dr. T'soni! We have to make it through, and that Geth isn't going to make it easy on us!" said Zartrack.

Sure enough, there in front of the Conduit, stood the Terror Geth. It growled as it saw the Helldiver convoy approaching and readied its plasma blaster.

"Hold on. They're only leaving one Geth?" Austin asked. "That doesn't make sense."

"Regardless of what they leave behind, that Terror Geth's standing between us and saving the galaxy. Helldivers, attack!" Zartrack ordered.

Some of the Convoy stopped and allowed some of the soldiers to get out so that they could fire on the Terror Geth. The Soldiers, the Tanks and the crab walkers all fired simultaneously. The Terror Geth however returned fire and also threw up its Omni shield. The whole battlefield became a blaze of gunfire between the Terror Geth and the Helldivers. Parts of the ground where blown apart by the plasma and explosions from the cannons littered the ground. Despite the Terror Geth's weapons however it was outnumbered one to hundreds, and it knew that. The Geth felt it was time to retreat. The Helldivers wouldn't be a problem. The Tunneler would take care of them.

As the Helldivers fired, the ground started to shake again, this time way more violently. Then they could hear the sound of heavy machinery and what sounded like some sort of drill.

"Does this planet have earthquakes or something?" Wrex asked as he still fired on the Terror Geth.

"Look!" Liara shouted.

All of the Helldivers looked. In the distance the Ilos towers where toppling over. Something massive was heading their way. Then Austin's hid lit up with a warning.

"Husk detected!"

A sudden realization came to Austin. No! It couldn't be. But his worst fears where quickly realised. The massive tentacles once again plunged right out of the ground. Then they were followed by a
massive snake like machine body. It was covered in spikes, knives and drills. The five tentacles also had saws and drills attached to them. The body also had another set of arms, but these weren't tentacles, they were actual organic arms. The five mechanical tentacles plunged into the ground and started to slowly lift the massive hulking body out of the ground.

The Terror Geth looked to the Tunneler it had just summoned. Just before the Geth vanished through the Conduit, it gave the order.

"Destroy them! Saren wants them dead!" it yelled.

The Terror Geth vanished through the Conduit and the Tunneler finished hauling its massive head out of the ground. Every single Helldiver stopped firing and stared in horror at the massive husk. The tunneler roared and plunged back into the ground and started to move towards the army. Austin too was frozen with fear at the sight of the husk. He knew full well what this creature was, or had been. It was no normal husk… It was a Thresher Maw!

To be continued...

Next chapter: Wrath of the Helldivers

I'll bet you didn't see that coming did you?
Chapter 22, Wrath of the Helldivers

PHEW! I finally did it! Would like to just point out though that this isn't the final chapter. There will be at least one more after this one and maybe another.

In the meantime, Enjoy! This one is epic! Just fair warning though that this chapter contains extreme violence and injury.

Chapter 22

Wrath of the Helldivers

The Thresher Maw husk, or the tunneler as it was called, once again burst out of the ground. Fortunately, that was enough to make the Helldivers regain their composure and they immediately opened fire on the husk. It was difficult though. One minute the tunneler was above ground, the next minute and had dove back into the ground leaving massive holes and chasms in its wake. All the large chasms and trenches on Eden Prime made sense now.

Once again, the Tunneler's tentacles burst out of the ground and started to attack the Helldivers. The soldiers immediately opened fire on the tentacles. They made sure to keep moving and not stay in the same place for too long. A tentacle could easily burst out of the ground and catch them if it did. Austin and the rest of the team also fired. Their job wasn't made any easier by the debris and rocks being thrown everywhere.

The Tunneler's head and body once again burst out of the ground and lunged onto one of the tanks. Its massive jaws dripped with oil and acid. The jaws clamped around the tanks as the head burrowed back into the ground, swallowing the whole tank in the process and killing several Helldivers with the debris and rocks. A few others though saw this as opening and fired on the rest of the Thresher Maw's body that was disappearing. The Tunneler seemed to screech slightly before its head and torso emerged again, along with the tentacles. It didn't try to disappear this time though. The body remained stationary, most likely so that it could see what it was doing. It was from there that Austin was able to get a good look at the Husks body, and at the same time see just how extensive its conversion had been.

There were loads of holes on the Thresher Maw's torso. This was an obvious sign that more than one of the tripods, which they had taken to calling dragon's teeth, had been used to convert it into this Tunneler. He guessed it hadn't been a seamless transformation.

The five tentacles, and also the Thresher Maw's own arms began to swipe at the Helldivers and the crab walkers that where firing on it. It was like fighting a massive squid with drills, saw and knives, if there ever was such a thing. The Tunneler's glowing red eyes eyed the whole battle as it continued to wrap around the Helldivers and the tanks like snakes. In a vague attempt to try and wound the Tunneler, several Helldivers broke out some of the heavy weapons and fired on the tentacles and metal, segmented body. The rockets didn't seem to do much damage but they definitely seemed to hurt the husk. Unfortunately, it retaliated by spitting huge tons of fiery acid which slowly, but painfully, melted the unfortunate Helldivers and anything it touched.

Austin and the team ran for cover behind a large of the ground that had been pushed up by the tunneler.

"Where not causing enough damage! That thing's too strong!" Zartrack shouted over the sound of
Tunneler's loud drilling, ground being thrown up and overturned, massive amounts of gunfire and the screams and shouts of desperate soldiers.

"What about the exo suit mechs? That would at least give us a chance." Austin suggested.

Zartrack took a quick moment to consider this.

"We don't have much of a choice!" he said as he ducked from a large dismembered crab leg being tossed over his head.

"Sandra, contact the Destroyer! Tell them to drop a mech in!" he ordered.

"Yes sir!" Sandra replied. She activated her omni tool and made contact with another one of the Helldiver carriers. "It'll take some time for the mech to get here!" she said.

"Spread out! Try to confuse it!" Zartrack ordered.

Austin, the rest of the group and the Helldivers that still remained employed flanking maneuvers and tried to work around the Tunneler. Still the tentacles and acid continued to claim Helldiver lives. It was almost as if the tentacles had minds of their own and knew exactly where they were. Thanks to large rocks and chunks of the ground being ripped up though, Austin and his team managed to make it to the other side. Fortunately, the Husk didn't notice them. Nor did it feel any of the blaster shots since it had armour plating on its back.

With the Tunneler surrounded, the entire army began to concentrate their fire. The Husk however, was smarter than they had thought and it was a fast reactor. Using its massive arms and long tentacles as a massive clubs, it began to spin its body at a fast rate and swung the arms at the Helldivers. The large knives, drills and spikes attached to the tentacles caused huge amounts of the ground to be tore up as it did. Just as the Thresher Maw Husk stopped though, a huge barrage of rockets and bullets suddenly hit it.

All the Helldivers that where still left looked up to see a heavy Hellhound drop ship firing at the Tunneler. It appeared to be carrying what looked like a large robot underneath it.

"Dropping Mech in now!" came the pilot's voice over the radio.

"Pull up! Pull up! Your altitude's too low! The Tunneler will…" Zartrack tried to warn the pilot, but it was too late.

The Tunneler noticed the Drop Ship firing at it and dove back into the ground. Before the pilot could react to this, the Tunneler once again burst out of the ground and lunged at the drop ship. The huge gaping jaws clamped down onto the drop ship and it started to violently shake it around. Fortunately, the locks holding the Exo Suit mech to the Hellhound broke. As the Thresher Maw Husk threw the damaged drop ship at a nearby Prothean tower, the Exo Suit fell towards the ground. To make sure that the fall didn't damage it, Austin accessed the controls with his omni tool and engaged the Mech's autopilot. The Exo Suit unfolded from its shut down mode and came alive. Identifying that it wasn't falling properly, it readjusted itself so that it landed upright like a Helldiver did.

Having finished with Hellhound, the Tunneler turned back to the Helldivers. It noticed that they were trying to retreat to the Conduit. The Husk would not let that happen.

"Stay behind me!" Austin ordered as he climbed into the mech. His own armour was clamped into place and the mech closed up.

The Helldiver Panther mechs where one of the most powerful machines ever created by the Arkanes.
Able to operate on auto pilot as robot mechs or be piloted by other Helldivers and used as Exo Suits, they were armed to the teeth with heavy weapons and armour. A massive mini gun adorned the right arm while the Mech's left arm had a large blade. In addition to this, the Panther mech had loads of other heavy guns and rifles.

With full control over the Exo Suit now, Austin fired on the maw while he covered the Helldivers retreat. The Tunneler roared and disappeared back into the ground. The Maw's tentacles burst out again and began to pick off the remaining Helldivers one by one. Austin managed to fire on one of the tentacles when it nearly caught Sarah and managed to punch another one away that nearly went for Liara. Just in time, he managed to spot another one underground about to attack. Just as it lunged out, he flipped right over the tentacle and swung the suit's blade arm at it. Timing it just right, he managed to sever the entire mechanical arm in half. The Tunneler recoiled and looked at it's now severed tentacle. For the Thresher Maw, that was the last straw. Seeing the Panther Mech as a more immediate threat, it initiated a loud roar and dove back into the ground. The whole ground underneath the Helldiver rumbled and shook violently. A huge chasm suddenly opened up, separating Austin and the Normandy crew from the Helldivers in the process. The Tunneler's head burst out of the gap and engulfed the Exo suit in its jaws. The mechanical strength of the Husk's mouth was too strong for Austin to break loose.

"Austin!" Liara yelled as she watched the suit struggle helplessly to break free. Just as the Thresher Maw began to start eating though, the suit opened up and Austin just managed to jump out of the Maw's mouth. He landed, feet first on the edge of the chasm that the Tunneler had created. Before anyone could do anything though, the Tunneler spat the damaged Panther Mech out of its mouth, spitting a huge load of acid out along with it in the process. Due to the ground being made very unstable by the Tunneler's drilling, the large piece of the ground where the wreckage landed fell away into the chasm. In the process, part of the ground that Liara had been standing on gave away as well, causing her to lose her footing.

"Liara!" Austin yelled. He immediately leapt over to Liar and just barely managed to catch her hand before she fell.

"Don't let me go!" Liara yelled as she dangled over the massive drop of the chasm. Using all of his strength, Austin groaned as he flung Liara back onto stable ground.

"You alright?" he asked.

"I'm fine." Said Liara as she got her breath back.

The Tunneler refocused its attention on the group. It seemed completely oblivious to the fact that the Helldivers where firing at its back on the other side of the chasm. The gaping jaws of the husk dripped with acid and it looked just about ready to pounce on them. All of the group readied their weapons; they didn't see how else this was going to end.

Then Sarah suddenly heard another noise. Through her Death Mask she looked to the sky to see a Helldiver atmospheric fighter flying towards them, guns blazing. The Tunneler immediately took notice of this and looked to its new attacker. As the fighter flew at full speed towards the Maw it continued firing. Unlike the drop ship though, the atmospheric fighters where much faster. The Tunneler lunged at the fighter but it missed due to the speed. As the fighter sped past, it pulled a massive turn and came round for another run. As it did, if fired two rockets at the husk. They both hit the Thresher Maw hard and it was temporarily weakened. As the Tunneler slowly used its remaining limbs to pick itself back up, the fighter continued firing and flew at full speed at the spot on the Husk's neck where the missiles had impacted. Before the Tunneler knew what had hit it, the Atmospheric fighter flew right through its neck, severing it completely in half. Due to the fighter's
strong armour, it wasn't damaged. The Tunneler's head fell to the ground and the now lifeless body fell into the chasm that it had created. The Atmospheric fighter simply flew away.

"Whoever that pilot is, I'm gonna give him a medal for that." Said Zartrack as he and the rest of the remaining Helldivers took a moment to get their breath back. On the other side of the chasm, Austin and the rest of his team did the same. He then looked at the chasm. There were no untouched bits at all. The Tunneler had dived the battlefield completely. Fortunately, their side had the Conduit.

"General, can you get across?" Austin yelled to Zartrack.

"We can, but it'll take time! You'll have to go ahead without us! We'll try and catch when we make it through!" Zartrack yelled back over the chasm.

Austin and the others understood. They didn't have time to wait for the Helldivers. They would have to go through the Conduit without them. Fortunately, the Mako had ended up on their side as well.

"Good luck, Shepard!" Zartrack yelled.

Austin closed the hatch and floored it.

The Presidium was in complete ruins. Debris and wreckage from the Geth attack was everywhere. Two Geth soldiers had been ordered to stay behind and guard the Conduit. As the Citadel's VI Avina kept issuing the evacuation warning, the small Mass Relay monument started to pulse and the central ring started spinning. The two Geth soldiers walked up to the Relay. To their surprise, a large rover suddenly appeared out of it crashed right into them. The sudden impact though caused the Mako to spin slightly. In the process, it lost a wheel and overturned completely. Austin and the rest of the team climbed out, slightly dizzy from the crash.

"That's the second time that's happened now." Tali groaned.

"Come on, into the elevator. We don't have much time." Said Austin.

Before the group could get to the elevator though, several of the Dragon's teeth that they hadn't noticed earlier retracted and the Husks on top of them dismounted. Everyone immediately pulled out their guns. As they fired on the husks, more and more of the Husks began to swarm around the group.

"Brother, we're surrounded!" said Sarah, a hint of worry in her voice.

"But not helpless." Austin added. "Stand your ground!" he ordered.

The Husks lunged at them, but they gunned down every single one. Despite the husks superior numbers, they were proving no match for the united efforts of the group. Some of the even pulled out their melee weapons and started either slicing or knocking the husks away. Austin in particular slashed away using Excalibur. The blade cut down every Husk it touched with a single strike. The two Krogan resorted to their brute strength rather than their guns and proceeded to smash, punch and head butt the Husks. Apart from Kraan, Alpha Squad used their Omi blades to carve a path through the zombies while the others used all their skills to keep the Husks back. Liara and Alaara in particular seemed to work very well together with their biotic coordination's. Both the Quarians meanwhile where able to use their tech skills to overload the electronics that the husks used. Finally, the group managed to clear a path to the elevator that would get them to the Citadel tower, and hopefully to Saren. There were far too many Husks for them to fight, so they were forced to seal the door. Throughout the transparent glass, they could say the emotionless faces clawing at the glass.
Not wanting to see the sight any longer, Austin pressed the button that would activate the elevator. The elevator slowly ascended and the Husks disappeared from view. As the elevator cleared the Presidium ring, they finally caught a view of the Citadel fully. The whole place was a blaze with ships firing on one another.

"My god." Said Dash.

There where Geth ships everywhere. The entire Citadel fleets where either scattered or destroyed. The massive flagship, The Destiny Ascension, was also under fire.

"Is it just me, or is the Citadel closing?" Sarah asked.

The whole group looked at the Citadel's arms. Sarah was right, they were closing. The station was being sealed.

"Where's Sovereign though? It should be at the head of the Geth fleet." Austin said as he tried desperately to see where the Reaper was. Eventually though, he gave up after the Citadel arms closed completely and any view of the battle was lost. As the elevator neared the top, the whole tower suddenly shook violently.

"That doesn't sound good." Said Ashley.

Then the elevator screeched to a sudden halt.

"We stopped." Said Sarah.

"Saren's locked down the elevator." Said Austin.

"Looks like we're stuck in here then." Said Dash annoyingly.

"When will you learn, Dash? There's always a way." Said Austin as unholstered his pistol.
"Everyone suit up! We're going for a little walk." He said.

Anyone that hadn't already been wearing a helmet put theirs on and secured them. With everyone ready, Austin fired at the elevators glass window. It shattered completely and all the oxygen left the confined space. Using their magnetic boots, they gently attached to the wall of the Citadel tower.

"I guess we know where Sovereign is now." Said Garrus.

Austin looked in his direction. The massive Reaper, Sovereign was clamped onto the Citadel tower. The whole group slowly made their way up the tower. From the looks of things, the Geth ships where attacking the inner bits of the Citadel and at the same time defending Sovereign. Despite running into a lot of Geth and Krogan on the tower, they made good progress and finally managed to make it to the top.

The very minute they entered the Council chambers; they were bombarded by Geth laser fire.

"Get to cover, now!" Austin ordered.

Everyone immediately did so. It appeared that they weren't alone either. Several C-sec officers where engaging the Geth as well. Austin crouched behind cover in front of one of them.

"Commander Shepard of the Helldivers. You the one in charge here?" Austin asked as explosions and laser fire echoed around them.
"Lieutenant Armando-Owen Bailey of C-sec." replied the officer. "Nice to finally see some reinforcements."

Austin blind fired a bit at the Geth before speaking again.

"Where's the Council?" he asked.

"They've been evacuated onto the Destiny Ascension. We've been trying to take back the Council Chambers but the Geth are too strong. Plus that Terror Geth of theirs isn't making it any easier." Bailey replied.

Austin risked a quick glance out of cover to assess the situation. That didn't work though as the moment he stuck he head out, he was shot at. Ducking back into cover, he took a small sensor from his belt and threw it. The small wave it emitted allowed him and the other Helldivers to see how many there where. There were still quite a lot of Geth at the top of the stairs. Worse still, they had the high ground and sure enough, the Terror Geth was heading the assault.

"What's the situation so far?" Austin asked.

"We've been trying to make a push on the Geth but we're too exposed. We've take heavy casualties." Said Bailey as he blind fired a few shots as well.

"Have they taken any hostages?" Austin asked.

"Fortunately, no. All they're doing is defending Saren." Said Bailey.

Austin looked over cover slightly to see Saren firing on them as well from his platform.

"The Geth are trying to advance on us as well, but we're keeping them back. At the moment though, there are too few of us. I don't think we can last much longer." Said Bailey.

Austin tried to think up a plan. It was hard though. The Geth had the high ground and more advanced weaponry. But they had more cover opportunities. There still wasn't enough for any of them to get close enough though. Then he noticed something blue on his HUD.

"What's that?" he asked.

"The Geth also have some kind of shield around them. It's kinetically sensitive. Energy and projectiles just bounce off." Bailey answered.

"The Geth never did play fair." Said Tali as she blind fired as well.

Austin took a moment to think. Then an idea hit him. He noticed that the Terror Geth had it's free hand on the shield generator and was keeping it operational.

"If I can get a drone in close enough, I can distract The Terror Geth. That'll knock the shield out long enough for us to take out the generator." He said. "If we can keep them distracted, I might be able to get it close enough."

Bailey considered for a minute.

"It's risky, but we don't have much choice." He said. "We'll concentrate on the shield and make it look like we're advancing."

Austin nodded. He turned to his own.
"Keep me covered." He ordered as he activated his spider walker.

Most of the remaining C-sec officers and Alpha Squad bolted from cover to cover and fired on the shield. Sure enough, it looked like they were attempting to advance and the Geth took the bait. All the while though, they were oblivious to the little robot spider slowly crawling around their defences.

Tali and Leena held back in order to build defence turrets and portable barriers. Liara also put up a biotic shield to protect the wounded while Alaara used her biotics to attack. Dash used his speed and agility to dodge most of the Geth fire before sliding into a safe position.

Finally, the spider made it through the shield and managed to get close enough to the generator that the Terror Geth was using. Austin knew that the spider couldn't destroy the generator, but it didn't need to. He only had to stop the Terror Geth from using it long enough for them to get a clear shot and destroy it. Unable to think of any other option, Austin made the spider jump onto the Terror Geth's face. Blinded by the robot clawing at its eye, the Terror Geth let go of the generator and tried to shake the spider off its face.

"Now! Fire on the generator!" Bailey ordered.

All the C-sec agents and the Helldivers fired on the generator.

The Terror Geth still struggled to get the spider robot off its face, in the process it was firing its plasma blaster a little madly. Eventually it did manage to grab the robot and crush it, but by that time it was too late. A large concussive shot from one of Bailey's men impacted on the generator and it exploded. Some of the explosion even hit the Terror Geth's eye stalk, causing it's vision to briefly malfunction. Without the shield the Geth where a bit disorganised. Then a familiar voice rang out.

"Helldivers, attack!" it ordered.

Austin and the others looked back to see General Zartrack and the rest of the Helldivers filing into the room and firing on the Geth.

With the Geth temporarily weakened, Austin seized his chance. To everyone's surprise, he leapt out of cover and ran at the Geth.

"Austin!" Liara called. She tried to run after him, but a large amount of laser fire forced her back into cover.

"What the hell's he doing?" said Zartrack.

Austin went mad as he ran. He fired at several Geth as he got closer. He relied on his suit's shields to absorb most of the fire. When he got close enough to another Geth he smashed its face with assault rifle. As it fell he continued running, firing at another and another. He smashed another Geth to the ground using his rifle. Another one came close but he activated his left omni blade and sliced it's head off. Another Geth attempted to melee him with its own rifle but he parried the attack and stabbed it in the stomach. With the Geth wounded, Austin then severed its head and smashed one away with his rifle. The Terror Geth was right in his sights now. With a clear path ahead he continued running. The Terror Geth growled at Austin and fired a plasma blast at him. The Helldiver however was quicker and fired a concussive shot just before the Terror Geth fired. As the shot impacted on the Terror Geth chest he rolled to avoid the plasma blast. He narrowly missed the blast as he rolled over it. His earlier concussive shot had temporarily weakened the Terror Geth and it had fallen to its knees. As it slowly got up, Austin shifted his assault rifle into his left hand and brought his right hand back. First he activated his omni blade and then another one flipped out as well making the omni blade now a dual symmetrical blade. The whole of his right wrist and hand was
then reinforced with armour and his small wrist blade came out as well. With his whole arm fully armoured, Austin thrust forward. The whole of the Terror Geth right chest and torso smashed apart as Austin punched through it. If the Terror Geth could've felt pain it would definitely have screamed. Instead, it only grunted and tried to reach for the Helldiver. Austin however whirled around and jumped at the Terror Geth. As he made contact, he embedded his super blade into the Terror Geth's face.

"You die!" Austin said as the Geth staggered and fell backwards with him still on it. Using his rifle he fired on the Terror Geth's head slightly to weaken it. Then using all his strength he gripped the Terror Geth's eye and pulled it. The whole of the eye stalk ripped away along with the Terror Geth's brain and memory core. The Geth spasmed for a minute and then the headless body went completely limp.

"And stay dead!" Austin shouted.

"You'll pay for that, Shepard!" Saren shouted from his platform as he aimed his Geth pulse rifle at Austin.

The Helldiver however reacted quickly and picked up the Terror Geth's plasma blaster. He quickly aimed and fired it at Saren's platform. The Turian didn't react quickly enough and the plasma blast impacted on his platform, sending it spinning wildly out of control.

Without their' leader, the Geth where disorganised. Despite this though, they still put up a rough fight for the Helldivers and C-sec. Fortunately, their military precision gave them the advantage.

Saren slowly got up from where he had landed when his Geth platform had crashed. He looked up to see Austin staring at him. The Helldiver was clearly ready for another fight. The other Geth didn't seem to take any notice of him since they were too busy with other Helldivers and C-sec.

"I was afraid you wouldn't make it in time, Shepard." He groaned as he stood up.

"Had to wipe out a few of your followers along the way. Sorry I kept you waiting!" said Austin. "So I'm in time for what?"

"The final confrontation. I think we both expected it would end like this." Said Saren. The sounds of heavy gunfire and explosions echoed around the two opponents. "You've lost. You know that, don't you? In a few minutes, Sovereign will have full control of all the Citadel systems. The Relay will open. The Reapers will return."

"I've still got a few tricks up my sleeve." Said Austin as he held up his still fortified right wrist.

"You survived our encounter on Virmire, and you managed to kill my Lieutenant. But I've changed since then. Improved. Sovereign has… upgraded me."

"Fancy hardware's not gonna save you." Said Austin.

"I suppose I should thank you, Shepard. After Virmire, I couldn't stop think about what you said. About Sovereign manipulating me. About indoctrination. The doubts bean to eat away at me. Sovereign sense my hesitation. I was implanted to strengthen my resolve. Now my doubts are gone. I believe in Sovereign completely. I understand that the Reapers need organics. Join us and Sovereign will find a place for you, too." Said Saren. Still he believed that what he was doing was right.

"Sovereign's controlling you through your implants! Don't you see that?" Austin asked as he tried to reason with Saren.
"The relationship is symbiotic. Organic and machine intertwined, a union of flesh and steel. The strengths of both, the weakness of neither. I am a vision of the future, Shepard. The evolution of all organic life. This is our destiny. Join Sovereign and experience a true rebirth!" Saren said as he still tried to convince Austin to join his cause.

Austin however, was having none of it. "Sovereign hasn't won yet. I can stop it from taking control of the station! Step aside and the invasion will never happen!" he said.

"We can't stop it! Not forever. You saw the visions. You saw what happened to the Protheans. The Reapers are too powerful." Said Saren defensively. Then a large omni shield, much like the one that the Terror Geth had used appeared from his left wrist. "Even in the face of death you still prefer to follow the fate of the Protheans." He said as an omni blade appeared from his right arm.

Austin could see where this was going. Holstering his assault rifle, he drew Excalibur from his back and also, after so long, removed his shield from his back, slotting it onto his left arm.

"Then we're done talking. This end's here!" he said.

Both opponents lunged at one another and clashed.

"I will help Sovereign succeed!" said Saren.

"Then, you'll have to go through me!" said Austin.

"Gladly!" said Saren as he kicked Austin away and stabbed at him. Austin parried the attack with his shield and returned with a stab from his sword. Saren however blocked it with his own shield.

Unlike Balak, Austin knew nothing about Saren's skills with a blade. His attacks where fast and at the same time, ferocious. Plus, the Turian's strength and implants give him an advantage over the Helldiver. Once again though, Austin had more experience than Saren and his reflexes where quick enough for him to counter parry Saren's stab. The only downside was that Saren would occasionally use his shield to bash Austin away in the same way that he himself often did. Eventually though, Austin found another advantage that proved to be a disadvantage for Saren. True, Saren's Geth arm was fast and very strong but it was heavy, so it slowed him down slightly. It also appeared to give him one or two balance issues. Austin risked a quick glimpse of the rest of the battle as he briefly ended up in a lock with Saren. The Geth numbers where dwindling now and the Helldivers where slowly pushing forward. It wouldn't be long now.

As the two opponents continued to clash blades with one another, exchanges flashed. Leaps were side slipped or met with flying kicks, ankle sweeps skidded over and punches parried. Austin tried to force Saren back, slamming his blade down with strength that seemed to flow from his suit automatically. He spun and whirled and sliced razor-sharp shards from the floor as Excalibur continued to clash against Saren's own blade. Saren then blocked a critical attack from the Helldiver and tried to force his opponent back as he continuously pounded away at Austin's swift movements. Austin however kept his cool, his balance flawless as he parried chop after chop. Both opponents then stood their ground and tried to disarm one another. They chopped and slashed and parried and blocked. Both opponents were an even match for one another so it was beginning to seem like they'd be at this all day. Finally, Austin caught a chance. It was a long shot, but he had to take it. He turned Saren's wrist aside with a block from his shield and landed a solid kick that knocked the two apart. With Saren temporarily disoriented by the kick, Austin lunged forward and brought Excalibur into Saren's left shoulder, or rather his Geth shoulder. Saren counteracted slightly by using his wrist to separate Austin's hand from his sword. Despite this though, Excalibur remained buried in the artificial shoulder. Austin quickly punched Saren in the face and pulled Excalibur as hard as he could to the side. Saren grunted in pain as his entire machine arm was ripped off. Taking advantage of Saren's weakness, Austin slashed both the Turian's legs and also cut him across the stomach. Saren
fell to his knees as he clutched his torso.

"You, cannot stop it, Shepard. Sovereign will succeed." Saren groaned in pain.

"Saren, some part of you must still realize this is wrong. You can fight this!" said Austin.

Saren seemed to hesitate. "Maybe you're right. Maybe there is still a chance for..." but he was interrupted by a sharp amount of pain. "The implants... Sovereign is too strong. I'm sorry. It's too late for me."

"No it's not." Said Austin as he held a gun in front of Saren.

"There's still one thing you thing you can do, if you've got the guts!" said Austin.

"You're giving me a loaded gun?" Saren asked as he took the pistol.

"There's one round left. Make your choice! Are you gonna let Sovereign control you? Or yourself? It's not over yet. You can still redeem yourself!" Austin asked.

He wasn't worried. He was giving Saren one chance to end it. Even if Saren fired at him, the shot wouldn't do any damage. Saren hesitated for a long time. For a moment he aimed the gun at Austin.

"You're better than this, Saren! Don't let that Reaper control your life!" Austin urged.

Saren once again hesitated. Then he spoke.

"Goodbye, Shepard. Thank you." He said. He then suddenly pointed the gun at his head and fired. All of the blue implants on Saren's face went dark as a gaping hole appeared in his head from the gunshot. He jarred as blood splattered a nearby wall. His body then lost its balance and fell into the small garden area below the platform.

Austin breathed a heavy sigh of relief as he got his breath back. It was over. He looked back to see the rest of the team and the Helldivers advancing. All the Geth where dead now.

"Is it over?" Zartrack asked.

Austin nodded. "It's over."

Everyone else breathed a sigh of relief.

"How'd you get up here? I thought Saren locked down the elevator." Tali asked.

"We managed to get it working again. Good thing we did." Said Zartrack.

"We're gonna head back down to the Presidium and search for any wounded." Said Bailey.

"We'll come with you, Lieutenant. We can cover more ground that way. Besides, I don't think we're needed here much longer." Said Zartrack as he and the Helldivers left the tower with C-sec.

Austin walked up to the holographic interface at the end of the platform. He activated his omni tool and used the data file that Vigil had given him.

"Vigil's data file worked. I've got control of all systems." He said.

"Then, quick! Open the station's arms. Maybe the fleets can take Sovereign down before he regains control of the station!" said Sarah urgently.
"See if you can open a communication channel." Said Liara.

Austin did so and managed to make contact with Destiny Ascension.

"… The Destiny Ascension. Main drives offline. Kinetic barriers down 40%. The Council is on board. I repeat, the Council is on board." Came the voice of the Destiny Ascensions' pilot.

At that moment, Joker's voice came over the radio.

"Normandy to the Citadel. Normandy to the Citadel. Please tell me that's you, Commander." He said.

"I'm here, Joker." Said Austin.

"We caught that distress call, Commander. I'm sitting here in the Andura sector with the entire Arcturus and Helldiver fleet. We can save the Ascension. Just unlock the relays around the Citadel and we'll send the cavalry in!" said Joker.

"You'd sacrifice human lives to save the Council? What have they ever done for your kind?" Wrex asked.

"This bigger than humanity. Sovereign's a threat to every organic species in the galaxy!" said Liara.

"That's why we can't throw away reinforcements trying to save the Council. Hold them back until the Citadel arms open up and the human fleet can go after Sovereign!" said Wrex.

"What's the order, Commander? Come in now to save the Ascension or hold back?" Joker asked.

Austin took a long moment to think about this. Personally, he'd been no fan of the Council. But if they died, it could very easily tear the galaxy apart through war. A war that even the Helldivers would not be able to win. Also, Sovereign was only a vanguard. If there were more Reapers out there, they needed the whole galaxy to work together. After a small wait, Austin made his choice.

"Opening the Relays now, Joker. Save the Ascension!" he ordered.

"I hope the Council appreciates this." said Wrex.

"If they don't, I'm never working for them again." Austin agreed. "But then again, they have already revoked my Spectre status, and I am glad of that."

From out of the massive window, they could see the massive fleets saving the Destiny Ascension and then going after Sovereign. Austin and the others looked down at Saren's body. Austin wasn't taking any chances.

"Make sure he's dead." He ordered.

Wrex and Kraan nodded and jumped down into the small garden beneath the platform and walked up to Saren's corpse. Wrex took out his gun and shot Saren in the head. There was no way the Turian could survive that.

"He's dead." Said Kraan into his communicator.

Before they could all relax however, the whole tower started to shake again and this time pulse with red electricity. Then Sovereign's voice boomed throughout the tower. "Assuming direct control!"

Saren's corpse then started to pulse with Sovereign's energy and writhe as if in pain. A huge
explosion sent Kraan and Wrex flying and the whole platform gave way. All of the rest of the team fell along with the platform into the gardens. Saren's corpse meanwhile continued to writhe and pulse with crimson energy. Then it stood up. Everyone watched as Saren's skin slowly seemed to melt off, revealing a horrific sight. An almost skeletal form of Saren stood in front of them.

"I am Sovereign, and this station is mine!" the corpse said with Sovereign's voice.

The husk began to jump from wall to wall as everyone did their best to fire on it. With it jumping around so much though, it was very difficult. The entire room once again became a battlefield of gunfire, tech powers and biotics as the team stood their ground against Sovereign.

Sovereign continued to jump and leap from wall to wall and ceiling as it continued firing its own attacks. Eventually, Austin fired a concussive shot at Sovereign and the husk was sent plummeting to the ground. It would take more than that to stop a Reaper though. Saren's corpse slowly got back up and lunged at the Helldiver Commander.

Austin fired several shots at Sovereign as the husk lunged at him only to be knocked down as Austin smashed it right in the face with his shield. Before Sovereign could do more damage, gunfire from Dash distracted it as the young Helldiver scout leapt onto the Husk's back. Sovereign however grabbed Dash and flung him violently at the wall. Dash hit the side with a very loud and painful clang but his armour prevented any serious damage or injury. The others fired on Sovereign but the husk threw a massive shockwave at the ground, sending them to the ground.

Austin swung it at Sovereign. The Reaper controlled corpse's reactions however were lightning fast and it nearly dodged every single one of them. As Austin attempted to deliver a lunge, Saren's corpse dodged the attack and grabbed Austin's arm. Before the Helldiver could react quickly enough, Sovereign flung him into the wall just as he had done with Dash. Unlike Dash however, Austin hit his head very hard leaving him completely dazed and almost motionless as he fell to the floor.

The rest of the group could only watch helplessly as their Commander appeared motionless. The shockwave had been some kind of biotic field and it was keeping them pinned to the ground. They couldn't move at all.

Sovereign slowly walked up to Austin ready to deliver the killing blow... It prepared for its final attack to fire a beam at Austin's face. It couldn't use Saren's other arm since Austin had severed it earlier. The loose hanging jaws of Saren began to glow as the Reaper charged up its beam.

"NO!" Liara cried.

Using all the biotic strength she could muster, Liara unleashed a massive biotic explosion which disintegrated the barrier completely. Without even hesitating, Liara threw a massive biotic warp at Sovereign. The Husk was thrown back slightly by the warp. Saren's corpse turned back to the now free Helldivers and the rest of the crew and began to shoot huge amounts of red lightning from its hands. They all screamed in pain as hundreds of volts coursed painfully through their bodies.

Austin's vision slowly cleared and he saw what was happening. Seeing Liara in pain was too much. Letting his anger and rage take over, he picked up Excalibur. Just as Sovereign noticed him it was already too late. Austin plunged the sword into Sovereign's head and twisted it violently to make it sure it stuck in there. Then using all the strength he had left, he brought Saren's corpse against his back and pulled. The whole of Saren's head and spine was completely ripped out as Austin pulled on his sword. Saren's now headless corpse staggered slightly and then fell to the ground. There was a small groan and the body disintegrated, along the head and spine still impaled on Austin's sword.

As everyone slowly regained their breath and recovered from the pain, Liara ran up to Austin.
"Nobody... fucks with my friends." Austin panted.

Liara simply hugged him.

Suddenly the whole tower shook violently. All of the team, including the wounded Austin, looked up to see the now non-functional Reaper shell of Sovereign falling from the Citadel tower. A bright blue beam from the Normandy suddenly shot through and the whole ship exploded into hundreds of pieces. Only too late did they notice that one of Sovereign's massive arms was heading for them.

"GO!" Austin yelled as she shoved everyone out of the way. The whole of the tower smashed as the arm hit it.

The C-sec teams and Helldivers combed the Citadel tower for survivors. The whole place was in ruins. Geth, Helldiver and C-sec bodies littered the place and the wreckage of Sovereign was all over the place.

"Captain Anderson, we've found them! They're in here!" one of the C-se officers called.

Lieutenant Bailey, Captain Anderson, General Zartrack and the rest of the Helldivers and C-sec agents rushed over to where all the team here lying. Some of them where a bit injured or damaged, but they were alive.

"Take it easy. It's okay, you're safe now." said Anderson as he helped Liara up. She was completely in tears and sobbing.

"Where's Shepard?" Zartrack asked worriedly.

Liara simply shook her head sadly and looked to where the massive arm had landed. There was no way that even a Helldiver could have survived that.

"No!" Sarah cried. "You can't do this to us, you selfish bastard!"

The N7 marine tried to rush to the wreckage but Ashley held her back. The rest of Alpha Squad hung their heads. Everyone else didn't really know what to say.

"Systems restarting." said the computer.

Austin slowly opened his eyes as he regained consciousness and became aware of his surroundings. He was still inside his suit. From the feel of things, it had gone into lockdown again.

"I must've passed out." Austin thought to himself.

It was only after that that he noticed he was pinned under a lot of debris. Thanks in large part to both his armor and his shield, all the debris had missed him. He did however notice that he had a large piece of reaper sticking out of his left leg.

"Oh blast." he groaned. "Why is it always me?"

As his lockdown deactivated he pushed against the debris with his shield until he was able to stand up. He then reached for the large spike stuck in his leg. Groaning in pain, he finally managed to pull it out.

Though still dazed and with blurry vision from his head knock earlier, he could see the rest of his team. They were all alive and seemed fine. They didn't seem to know where he was though. Liara
was on her knees in tears and Ashley was holding Sarah back. They thought he was dead.

"Why? Why'd you have to leave?" Liara cried.

"I'm not going anywhere!" Austin called back.

Everyone immediately looked to the sound of his voice and saw him stagger out of the rubble and move towards them. Liara immediately ran up to the Helldiver and hugged him tightly. He didn't even hesitate to hug her back. Liara then removed her helmet and did her best to remove his. When she did, she kissed him without even looking at him. After a long time, Liara finally broke for air.

"I thought I'd lost you." Liara sobbed as she hugged him again.

"I'm never leaving you, Liara. I love you." he said.

"I love you too," Liara replied.

Sarah then run up and hugged her brother tightly.

"Don't you ever do that again!" said Sarah as she too cried with tears of joy.

Austin smiled slightly. "Did you call me selfish bastard?" he asked.

"Might have." Sarah replied.

Then Austin's vision began to blur.

"Oh dear. Blood loss." he said just before he passed out.

"Austin!" Liara cried as he fell into her arms again.

"Hold on, Shepard. Medic!" Zartrack yelled as he ran up to help Liara carry the unconscious Helldiver.

Back aboard the Normandy, Austin was quickly rushed into the infirmary with Doctor Chakwas and several Helldiver medics in tow. If Liara could have been with Shepard she would have been but Chakwas had told her as well as the rest of the crew, including Alpha Squad, to remain outside for the moment and had assured Liara that she would be the first one allowed to see the Commander after he'd been tended to.

After less than an hour, Chakwas came out of the medical bay with a clipboard in her hand.

"How is he?" Liara asked worriedly.

"He's fine." said Chakwas unsurprisingly. Small wound his leg and a rather severe knock to the head, but nothing he won't heal from."

"Well, he's had worse." said Alaara.

"He said the exact same thing." said Chakwas.

"He's awake?" Liara asked, stunned.

"Surprisingly, yes. He regained consciousness a few minutes ago." Chakwas replied.
"Can I see him?" Liara asked.

"Of course you can. He asked for you anyway." Chakwas replied. "You as well, Sarah."

Sarah was surprised at first but she quickly joined Liara as they headed into the med bay.

Liara and Sarah entered and smiled at Austin. He quickly noticed them.

"Hey, bro. How you doing?" Sarah asked happily as she and Liara walked up to him.

"Not bad. Bit of a headache, but otherwise I'm good." Austin replied.

Liara simply hugged him again and kissed him on the lips. Sarah also kissed him on the cheek.

"Other than the leg wound and head knock, a few cuts and bruises and nothing major." said Chakwas.

"So how long until he's cleared?" Liara asked as she held Austin's hand.

"One whole week at most." Chakwas replied. She sounded impressed.

"Only a week?" Liara asked.

"Accelerated healing." Austin explained. "Injuries that would normally take months only take weeks."

He winced slightly as more antibiotics were applied to the wound in his leg.

"In the meantime though, you need to rest. If you're feeling better tomorrow, I'll let the rest of the crew in to see you. But for now, get some sleep." said Chakwas.

Sarah and Liara got the message and stood up to leave. Just as they did, Liara and Austin kissed one last time.

"Love you, Liara." he said.

"I love you too, Austin." Liara replied.

Sarah simply smiled. "Couples." she sighed.

And there you have it!

There'll be two more chapters after this involving the aftermath, Benezia's funeral, Liara meeting Shepard's mother, and the Council meeting.

After that i'll be writing a small spin off story involving Shiala and Lizbeth. It will be a sex fic since no one has yet done one involving Shiala, so I thought i'd be the first. I was planning originally for the fic to involve Shiala and a female Shepard and for it to be a separate story to the Helldiver saga, but I eventually thought "No one says it has to have Shepard in it." and i also came up with enough ideas that would enable the story to be set in the same universe and timeline as the saga. The new story will be written once i've finished this whole story and then once i've done the Shiala spin off i'll start writing ME2. I'm really excited about the second one since i've come up with so many ideas and story changes that'll make it so much more unique.
compared to other fanfics.
Chapter 23, Is this the End?

Final chapter! Fair warning, this final chapter contains sex and masturbation and also a post credits cliffhanger.

I'd like to thank everyone for all your reviews and support of my work. I'd especially like to thank, dark-babydragon for his undying support, writing reviews for every single chapter in my story and also contributing some of his ideas to the Upcoming ME2 story.

Enjoy the last chapter! It's been fun!

Chapter 23

Is this the End?

Austin slowly woke up from a very peaceful sleep. It had been two weeks now since the battle of the Citadel and the defeat of Sovereign. The minor injuries he'd sustained had long since healed to the point where it seemed like they'd never even been there. As Austin sat up from his long sleep he noticed that the bed was empty. Liara had since moved her stuff into his quarters and had slept with him every single night. In fact all of the crew that weren't Alliance planned to stay on the Normandy a little bit longer. Tali in particular had said she was in no rush to leave and was willing to stay a little longer. Even Alpha Squad where still on board to make sure that their Commander, soon to be their Captain according to rumours, didn't get involved in something huge again without them. The extended stay though had given the non-Alliance crew plenty of time to think over what they planned to do. Wrex had said that he planned to return to the Krogan home world Tuchanka to try and help his people more, Garrus, as he had said, had now applied for a position in the Helldivers. He hadn't heard anything back yet, but Alpha Squad had told him that it sometimes took a few days to get a reply from the application. Tali obviously would go back to the Migrant fleet to complete her Pilgrimage, however she'd be sad to go. She had really bonded with this team and saw them as a second family. Liara though, was still unsure. She hoped to continue her Prothean studies, but at the same time she didn't want to leave Austin. She had at one point suggested that she stay until all the Reapers had been stopped. She and her lover both knew after all that Sovereign was just a Vanguard and that the real fight was still to begin.

Austin could hear the sound of running water. Liara was having a shower. Austin sighed and lay back down as he thought about her. He smiled as an image of a naked Liara came into his mind. Then he began to hear a rather unusual sound. It sounded like moaning.

"Ooh… faster Austin… ah…" he heard Liara say.

"No fair. She's masturbating without me." Austin thought. He thought about joining her, but she had locked the door. Plus she most likely wouldn't hear him asking to come in. Ever since the night before Ilos, Liara had been becoming a much louder lover. He knew this because this hadn't been the first time he had heard Liara touching herself. Another image of Liara came into Austin's mind. This time though, it was far dirtier. He imagined her right hand reaching lower, reaching her dripping Azure and stroking it vigorously. She was then using the shower head as a sex toy and rubbing it against her pussy while her other hand squeezed one of her large breasts. As he continued to think of Liara fucking herself as he listened to her moans of pleasure, he could feel his cock beginning to
stiffen. Unable to resist the growing urge in his shaft he began to stroke it, thinking about Liara, hoping he could actually cum this time, unlike previous attempts.

Liara moaned loudly as she continued to use the shower head on her leaking Azure. She let out a quiet moan as she closed her eyes, thinking of Austin thinking about her stroking herself while he himself stroked his own wonderfully massive cock, his eyes glazed over and darkened with lust, his throat bobbing up and down as he swallowed dryly.

"Stroke it faster, Austin!" Liara moaned.

Austin was taken a back slightly as he head Liara pleading for him to stroke his cock faster. Could she sense what he was doing?

"Might as well do whatever she's thinking about." Austin thought slyly in his mind.

He began to stroke himself faster and more roughly as he continued fantasizing about Liara touching herself. Then he heard the water stop and the door unlock. Before he could do anything, Liara walked out of the shower. Surprisingly, she was still dripping wet and still appeared to be rubbing her pussy. She was surprised to see her boyfriend stroking himself.

"Heard me, did you?" she asked seductively as she watched her bond mates cock throb slightly. That just made her even hornier. "Mind if I join you?"

Austin smiled and patted a spot on the bed next to him. Liara smiled back and laid down next him. She resumed rubbing her azure as she watched Austin continue to stroke his cock to her. They both moaned rather loudly to encourage each other even more. Austin seemed even more spurred on by Liara's moans than she was by his. Liara watched as Austin's cock seemed to grow even more as it prepared for the imminent cum shot. She imagined that huge dollops of cum was about to spurt from the shaft as he masturbated to her touching herself.

"Oh God! I'm getting close, Liara." Austin moaned as he stroked faster and faster as Liara squeezed her breast.

"I want you to paint me, I want you to throw ropes of your delicious white jizz over my body, decorate me and mark me as yours just as I've marked you as mine..." Liara growled sultrily. She watched Austin's cock seem to grow purple. Her body was getting even more excited, waiting to receive the no doubt explosive ejaculation of his sticky cum, and she started panting as she stared at his now literally pulsing purple member. That was just before it erupted. Austin watched as long ropes of cum, much as the ones he'd shot into Liara's body many times before, painted her large breasts and face. Nine huge spurts later, he finally shot a couple more normal loads that landed on her smooth stomach.

Liara moaned and sighed as her boyfriend's cum bathed her body.

"Feels so good. Feels so warm." she sighed as she licked some of the cum off her breasts. She then moved down to Austin's cock and took it into her mouth. She sucked greedily on it as she swallowed the last of her boyfriend's cum.

"Oh yeah! Good girl." Austin moaned as he stroked Liara's head crest. A wet sucking sound came from Liara's mouth as she sucked even harder on the shaft. The Asari wrapped both her hands around the lower regions of her lover's cock and squeezed it tightly. Austin then suddenly flipped her over so that she was on top of him and her glistening pussy was right in front of his face. Liara briefly allowed his dick to pop out of her mouth so that she could beg him to lick her.
Austin didn't hesitate and latched his mouth onto Liara's Azure. She moaned and hummed loudly onto his cock as he licked at her pussy. His tongue flicked against the tip of Liara's clit and pressed into it roughly, and the Commander's lips sucked on the cunt's outer lips. His actions had no pattern or predictability; he was going back and forth between licking and sucking. Austin's mouth was all over Liara's soaked womanhood, and his muffled moans and wet licking sounds filled the room while Liara still continued to pleasure him with her mouth. Austin thoroughly enjoyed eating out Liara's perfect pussy, but he felt his own crotch beginning to build up its own burning heat. He couldn't ignore that he was about to ejaculate again. Even though he had already blown a huge load a few minutes before, his large cock was pent up with more lust. It stood up straight and continued to beat slightly with his pulse inside Liara's warm mouth.

Liara was enjoying this just as much as Austin was. She hummed as she expertly bobbed her head on his Enormous cock while her wet saliva dripped ever more from the tight seal of her mouth and her lover's beef stick.

"Ohh yeah! Mmmm fuck! Can't believe you're taking it all!" Austin moaned in amazement as the Asari deep throated his entire cock. Her hand now fondling his huge balls, she grinned at her boyfriend's clear satisfaction.

"Open wide!" he said.

Liara did so and opened her mouth wide, ready to swallow the cum. Austin's cock once again erupted and large amounts of cum shot out of his cock and into her waiting mouth. Liara once again made sure to suck and lick it all up before slowly lifting her head off his cock, she licked her lips, satisfied with her performance. Then she felt her own imminent release as Austin plunged his tongue deep into her pussy. Liara cried out in pleasure and came all over the Austin's face. Her warm juices gushed into his mouth and down his chin, and a few small squirts landed on his hard stomach. As this messy orgasm covered Austin, Liara continued to rub herself against the Commander's face and moan. Her moans were a combination of sporadic gasps, high pitched whines, and loud groans.

"Goddess!" she screamed as she began to lose control. Her body went limp and her sloppy grinding started to slow down. She fell on her side and gasped for air as she lay on the bed. Her body was dotted with small beads of sweat, and her pussy was glistening with her leaking fluids. She used her last bit of strength to flip onto her back, and she closed her eyes. Her breasts heaved with each of her breaths, and her nipples were still hard and erect.

Austin was so much in love with this gorgeous Asari's body, and he couldn't stop himself from jacking off as he stared at it. Liara looked so vulnerable and almost cute while she squirmed around on the floor in the afterglow of her orgasm. Austin also noticed that Liara had slipped a hand between her legs and was gently rubbing her pussy. Her breathing seemed to match his gentle but tight strokes.

"You like it, don't you?" he asked slyly as he continued to pump his cock.

"I'm still so horny. I want your cock in my pussy." Liara moaned.

"I'll be on top." Said Austin.

Before Liara could respond, he pounced on top of his lover, and lined his throbbing member over her glistening Azure.

"One more?" he asked.

"Yes! Forget love making! I need to be fucked!" Liara pleaded.
"Your wish is my command." Said Austin.

Austin thrust forward into Liara's Azure and began to pound her roughly. He squeezed Liara's ass and thrust into her wet pussy as fast and as hard as he could. The Asari began to pant rapidly, and she felt her body stiffen and tingle with pleasure each time the massive dick filled her. Sweat covered her flawless body, and her limbs were going numb. Liara moaned as her pussy was pounded by Shepard's throbbing erection, and she closed her eyes and gripped the sheets tightly.

"Oh Goddess! Fuck me, my love!" Liara cried as Austin continued to push into her.

"Melding?" Austin asked.

Liara nodded and joined their minds together. Both lovers moaned together as their pleasures became their own. Austin moved his head down and sucked on Liara's bust as he continued pounding his cock into her Azure. Finally he felt himself getting close. Liara felt it too.

"Cum with me!" she moaned.

Both lovers gripped each other tightly as Austin shot one final load of sticky cum into Liara's womb and large amounts of juice squirted from Liara's Azure. Austin flipped off of Liara and lay next to her. Both of them panted heavily for breath.

"Next time you have a shower, let me know." Austin said as he smiled at Liara.

"Of course." Said Liara.

Both lovers pulled one another into a final kiss before they started getting dressed.

"You must be joking!" said Austin.

Him and all the rest of the crew, including Alpha Squad where in Flux. They now celebrating their victory over Sovereign together.

"Afraid we're not. Guess we'll no longer be calling you Commander… Captain." Said Dash as he put his feet up on the table.

All of the Helldivers where in their armour but they all had their helmets off. Austin's armour had finished being repaired. Somehow it seemed to work even better than before.

"To our Captain." Said Alaara as she raised her drink. Everyone else did the same.

"To the Captain." They repeated.

So, Shepard. It's our understanding their something going on between you and our… Prothean Expert." Said Sandra suggestively as she put her arm around Alaara. Austin could tell where this conversation would eventually go.

"Indeed. I guess you were right when you said I might get a girlfriend on this mission." Austin replied. He too put his arm around Liara who nuzzled up to him.

"Liara's not Alliance though." Alaara corrected.

"Nothing saying that I have to be." Liara said defensively.

"Sorry, Liara. I didn't mean it like that." Alaara apologized.
Liara just nodded. She hadn't meant to sound so threatening when replying back. But she loved Austin more than anything and was not about to let ranks and military stop that.

"My bond mate sometimes gets carried away. For that apologize. I do try to keep her under control." Said Sandra.

"What are you gonna do? Spank me?" Alaara teased. The Asari Helldiver then turned back to Liara. "I don't mean to pry, but I gotta ask, Liara. Have you two Embraced Eternity yet?" she asked.

"Alaara!" Sandra objected.

Before the human could say any more though, Liara answered the question.

"Yes we have." She said.

"Oh really. So, did you use our unique Melding biotics?" Alaara asked suggestively.

Sandra gave her bond mate a small slap for that.

"One more word out of you and you're not getting anywhere with me tonight." She said.

"Come on though! You always love it when I use it on you; it'd be nice to know at least that our Captain knows what I'm talking about." Alaara said in defence.

"I'm not answering that T'onrak. I don't think Austin's sex life and mine is anyone's." said Liara.

Alaara however took that as a yes. So did Sandra and the giggled with Alaara.

"That good was it?" Alaara asked. She quickly ignored that question though when she saw her Sandra's glare.

"Are you asking because you haven't tried it yourself yet?" asked Sarah who'd been listening in on the conversation. Sandra laughed at this. Alaara did too though.

"Actually I have. Hundreds of times. I always like a woman with a large bust." Alaara replied as she winked at Sandra. She only enjoyed it briefly though before Sandra slapped her again. Once again though, it wasn't a hard one.

"Say that again about my tits and you're not on top tonight." She said. Alaara sulked slightly.

"I think what Alaara is just trying to ask is if you two have got to the more intimate stages of your relationship." Said Sandra, trying to sound gentle.

"We have. Now I would prefer you left the subject alone." Said Austin sternly.

"Yes, Captain." They both said.

"Something I'd be interested though is why you're so obsessed with sex?" Sarah asked.

Alaara was quite for a bit before she answered. It wasn't that she was offended by the question, nor was she uncomfortable answering it. It was just so hardly anyone, except Sandra, asked her that kind of question. Even the rest of her squad mates didn't quite know about the reason why she loved sex so much.

"This should be interesting." Said Austin as he lay back slightly in his chair and rubbed Liara's arm slightly.
"There are many reasons. Partly it may be because so many people view Asari in a sexual way." Said Alaara.

Liara actually nodded in agreement. "That is true. A lot of young males have an unhealthy obsession with Asari." She said.

Austin looked at her with a bit of surprise. "Oh my wounded heart." He said in a joking manner. Liara quickly corrected herself.

"You however, my love, make an exception. In your case it's a very healthy obsession." She said.

Both lovers smiled to one another and briefly kissed. Both Alaara and Sandra smiled at them.

"You still didn't answer my question, Alaara." Said Sarah. "Your obsession with fucking can't be just from some Asari stigma."

"Alright, since you've asked twice. Mostly it's to do with my mother." Said Alaara.

"Your mother?" Sarah asked.

"Yeah, actually who is your mother?" Austin asked.

"Elraa T'onrak. You ever heard of her?" Sandra asked.

Austin, Sarah and Liara shook their heads.

"She's a very famous Asari porn star. Probably best known for her long partnership with Matriarch Esree. They're the first ones to do a Maiden/Matriarch porn series." Said Sandra.

"Let me guess, the Matriarch is your father?" Sarah asked.

"Yeah. They actually both told me how I was conceived once I was old and mature enough to understand." Said Alaara. "One time they were shooting a scene with them both making love, they had full union and everything so that they could enlarge their tits and one of them to grow their clit to a large size to use as a phallus, and the connection ended up being so deep that my mother ended up pregnant with me. After that, I guess both their love of sex rubbed off on me. Unlike them though, I'm not afraid of modesty."

"So both you're parents where Asari, like Liara's?" Austin asked.


"None taken." Said Liara.

"You're parents are still together you say?" Sarah asked.

"Yes. They make a porn movie together every year or so. Sometimes they do it on their own, other times they bring other people in to join them." Said Alaara.

"Hmmm... I should keep an eye out." Said Sarah as she sat back in her seat.

Austin was surprised by what his sister had just said.

"Sarah, is that the best way to spend your time?" came a female voice.

Everyone turned around to see Captain Hannah Shepard.
"Mom? What a surprise. Didn't expect to see you here." Said Sarah.

The Alliance Captain smiled at her two children. "You didn't think we'd miss our son's promotion?" Hannah asked.

"Us?" Austin asked.

To everyone's amazement another Helldiver appeared right next to Hannah. This Helldiver was none other than General Matt Shepard, Austin and Sarah's father.

True to what a lot of people said, Matt looked very much like his son, some differences though was that Matt had a much older and more veteran like look to him. Like Austin, Matt's face had a lot of noticeable scars. There loads on his face and several large ones across his head, which as a result left several gaps in his short brown hair. Like his son, his also had brown eyes and a British accent. Unlike Austin though, Matt had much shorter hair.

Like his son, the Helldiver General hadn't done much to alter his armour. A few features and additions he had made though was the medals which where engraved and painted onto his chest plate to denote his rank as a General. As expected as well, Matt had the same identical Shoulder armour that Austin had. Unlike his son though, Matt had his on his right shoulder rather than the left that his son had. Matt's most noticeable feature though was that both his left arm and leg where both cybernetic. Matt had lost his arm around 10 years ago when he returned from his leave of absence of raising his son. It had happened during one of the many wars against the Batarians in the Terminus systems. An explosion from a nearby shell had caused Matt to lose his footing and he had landed on a bomb. The explosion had blown his arm off and he had been hospitalized for a whole month. This injury however was not something that the Arkanes couldn't treat. Due to their experience on inventing the Helldivers, the Arkanes also became experienced in building highly advanced cybernetics. Because of this, Matt had had his missing arm replaced by a cybernetic one. Due to the extremely advanced technology the arm still enabled him to feel through it since the cybernetics had their own nervous systems. It had taken some getting used to, but Matt had quickly returned to active duty. The leg meanwhile was a slightly different story. Matt had lead an assault on a massive Batarian base where hundreds of slaves were being kept. The operation had been successful with no casualties but one of the Batarians had managed to set the base's self-destruct sequence. Matt had saved all the colonists and his men but had got his left leg caught in the blast at the last minute. Although he had managed to survive, his leg had far too badly injured to be healed properly and it had to be amputated. Matt however had refused to let the injury force him into an early retirement and had replaced his missing leg with the Cybernetic one he wore today.

Upon seeing the General, all of Alpha Squad got up from their seats and saluted. Apart from Zartrack, Matt was one of the most respected and high ranking Generals in the Helldiver army.

"At ease, Alpha Squad." said Matt. The General then turned to his son and daughter. Sarah stood up and hugged while Austin simply shook hands. They did both smile at each other though.

"Dad! How nice to see you!" said Sarah.

"To what do we owe the pleasure?" Austin asked.

"Do I need a reason to see my own children?" Matt asked happily.

"But aren't you needed out there? In the Terminus Systems?" Sarah asked.

"It's not critical. They can manage a few days or so without me." said Matt. He then noticed Liara and the rest of the crew. "Are you going to introduce us?"
"Of course. Mum, dad, this is Liara T'soni. Liara, this is my mother, Captain Hannah Shepard, and my father, General Matt Shepard." Austin introduced.

Liara was a bit speechless by meeting the parents of her lover. She shook hands shyly with Hannah first, then Matt.

"It's a real honor. Austin always speaks of you with great fondness." She said.

"It's nice to meet to you as well, Liara. Austin has said a lot about you as well." Said Hannah warmly.

"You're too kind, Captain Shepard." Said Liara. She still sounded shy and she seemed to be blushing slightly.

"You're allowed to use my first name, Liara. You are my son's girlfriend after all." Said Hannah.

"Maybe even future daughter in law." Matt said as a joke. Sarah couldn't help but chuckle slightly. Austin and Hannah however didn't think that was something to joke about.

"Dad!" He said indignantly.

"It might be possible." Matt suggested. Hannah could tell however that this was making Liara a bit uncomfortable.

"Darling, behave." she said, trying to keep her husband under control. It hadn't been the first time she had to do so. Although she knew Matt only ever had eyes for her, she did sometimes become defensive when she saw him talking or joking with other women. "I'm sorry, Liara. Matt's not quite the same gentlemen as his son." She apologised.

"And that's why you love me, Hannah." Matt added as he wrapped his cybernetic arm around his wife.

"Dad!" Austin hissed. But the General silenced him.

"So, Liara, I think we'd all be interested to know what your intentions are towards our son?" Matt asked. He sounded serious this time.

Austin face palmed. He hated it when his parents were like this.

Surprisingly though, Liara didn't seem nervous by this and stood her ground. "I love Austin, and he loves me, we're going to see how it develops from there, but as Austin once said, I'm hoping for 'marriage." She hoped she hadn't said anything wrong.

Matt was surprised by this. "I've heard of love at first sight but… you've worked fast, mate." He said to his son. A thought suddenly came to him. "How old are you?" he asked Liara.

"I am only one hundred and six…"

"Barely and adult by your people's standards, I know." Matt nodded. Hannah seemed to have brief bit of concern on her face. Austin knew why.

"This is your father?" Wrex asked as the rest of the Normandy crew joined the conversation.

"Indeed I am. And you are?" Matt inquired.

"Mum, Dad, this is my crew. They're the ones that helped me defeat Saren." Austin said as he
introduced the Normandy crew. Just as he had finished introducing everyone though, his omni tool bleeped. He had an incoming message. Excuse me a minute, would you.” He said.

Austin found a more private location of Flux and activated the message. Captain Anderson's face appeared on the screen.

"Shepard. Good to see you've made a full recovery. Also congratulation on your promotion, Captain." He said.

"Thank you, Anderson. Though, I doubt you've called me just to congratulate me." Austin replied.

"The Council wishes to speak to us and Ambassador Udina." Said Anderson.

"What do they want this time?" Austin asked in frustration.

"Couldn't say." Said Anderson.

"Alright. I'll be right up." Austin sighed.

All three of the Council stood in front of the Ambassador and the two Captains. Austin could only hope he wasn't in for another lecture. Hopefully though, the Council where grateful. It was his choice after all that had saved them.

"Ambassador Udina, Captain Anderson, Commander Shepard." Said the Asari Councillor.

"It's Captain now." Austin added.

"Then I apologise, Captain. We were not aware that you had been promoted. We have gathered here to recognize the enormous contributions of the Alliance and Helldiver forces in the war against Sovereign and the Geth." Said the Asari Councillor.

"Many humans and Helldivers lost their lives in the battle to save the Citadel. Brave and courageous soldiers who willingly gave their lives so that we-the Council-might live." Said the Salarian Councillor.

"There is no greater sacrifice, and we share your grief over the tragic loss of so many noble men and women." Said the Turian councillor.

"This is sounding promising." Austin thought.

"The Council also owes you a great personal debt, Captain. One we can never repay. You saved not just our lives, but the lives of billions from Sovereign and the Reapers." Said the Asari Councillor.

"Captain Shepard, your heroic and selfless actions serve as a symbol of everything humanity and the Alliance stand for." Said the Salarian Councillor.

"I'm still just as much part of the Helldivers." Austin objected. They deserved just as much credit as the Alliance did. Maybe even more.

"Indeed. We may not agree with their operation in the Terminus Systems, but sometimes they have their advantages." The Asari Councillor agreed.

"And thought we cannot bring back those valiant soldiers who gave their lives to save ours, we can honor their memories through our actions." Said the Turian councillor.
"Humanity has shown it is ready to stand as a defender and protector of the galaxy. You have proved you are worthy to join our ranks and serve beside us on the Citadel council." Said the Asari Councillor.

"Wow! I've heard of being grateful, but…” Austin thought.

"Councillor, on behalf of humanity and the Alliance, we thank you for this prestigious honor and humbly accept." Said Udina.

"At least he's finally happy." Austin thought. It did now occur to him that he was the cause of all this. Without him they would not even be here. It was another victory he could count in his collection.

"We will need a list of potential candidates to fill humanity's seat on the Council." Said the Salarian Councillor.

"Given all that has happened, I am sure your recommendation will carry a great deal of weight, Captain. Do you support any particular candidate?" the Asari Councillor asked.

"What? Why are you leaving this up to me? I'm just a soldier, not a diplomat. Besides, I never said I supported anyone." Austin objected. He had been forced to make many hard choices in his life, but this was too big for him.

"The choices you have made have saved the entire galaxy, Captain. Why should we doubt your decision's now?" the Turian councillor asked.

"Well, one of my decisions got my Spectre status revoked." Austin answered.

"We understand your decision now, Captain. You did what you had to do. It's fair to say that if you hadn't, we wouldn't have been alive now to regret not aiding you." Said the Asari Councillor.

Austin considered for a moment. Ultimately though, he knew this choice was not up to him. This was something that humanity itself would decide, not him.

"This shouldn't be my choice. All of humanity should have the right to choose, not just me. So my answer is, let the politicians figure this one out." He said.

"Your answer is understandable, Captain." Said the Salarian Councillor.

"Indeed. This is too important to rush into." Said Udina.

"Of course, Ambassador. We will welcome your candidates with open arms, whomever they may be." Said the Asari Councillor.

"Also, we still have yet to reward you ourselves. Your promotion is indeed prestigious, but we feel you deserve more for all you've done, Captain." Said the Turian Councillor.

"You have something in mind?" Austin asked. He couldn't really think how the Council could top a promotion. Unless they planned to make him a Major. That was very unlikely though. Plus, the Arkanes would disapprove of it as well. They decided whether their soldiers where worthy of ranks, not the Council.

"Yes. But we unsure how to proceed with it. Although we have revoked your status as a Spectre, we feel that by saving us and the Citadel you have earned that position back." Said the Turian councillor.
"Oh no!" Austin groaned in his head. Just when he thought he’d put that behind him.

"That seems a fair reward." Anderson agreed.

"Don't encourage them Anderson!" Austin mumbled. His helmet hid the noise completely. But then the Council spoke again.

"However, we are fully aware of your negativity towards it. Ultimately we have come to the decision to give you the choice on whether you want the Spectre title back." Said the Asari Councillor.

"You mean I have a choice this time?" Austin asked.

The Council nodded. Austin thought for a moment. He still didn't want to be a Spectre, but at the same time, humanity needed a symbol of hope and that had been him. No though… Eventually he decided on an appropriate answer.

"I appreciate the offer Councillors. But with your permission, I need some time to think about this." He said.

"We understand, Captain. It is never an easy decision." Said the Salarian Councillor.

"The battle with Sovereign destroyed our illusions of peace and security. Now the galaxy will look to not just us, but the Alliance and the Helldivers to defend them." Said the Turian Councillor.

"Sovereign was just a vanguard and it nearly wiped you out. You won't stand a chance if the whole Reaper fleet shows up. Not unless we find some way to stop them." Said Austin as he left the room. He had a lot of work to do. As he did, Udina addressed the Council.

"Shepard's right. We're on the verge of war with an enemy unlike any the galaxy has ever known; a war for the very survival of all life as we know it. Humanity is ready to do its part. We will not back down. We will not surrender." Said the Ambassador. Anderson then joined in.

"With the support of the other races we can win this battle. With them behind us, we can stand against the Reapers return and drive them back into dark space!"

The Coffin containing Benezia's preserved body followed just behind them as it hovered above the ground. Alaara and Sandra followed as well. It turned out that Alaara had at one point worked as a commando for Benezia a few years or so before she became a Helldiver. Sandra meanwhile refused to let her bond mate go anywhere without her.

"Hmmmm, Thessia's changed slightly since I was last here." Said Austin as he admired the tall and elegant buildings of Thessia.

"You've been here before?" Liara asked.

"I came here once on a training mission. That was about eight or seven years ago, I think." Said Austin.

"I haven't been here for many years either. I grew up here you know. Benezia raised me here." Said Liara. As she said it she looked at Benezia's body in the hovering coffin. She touched the glass slightly. Austin noticed her sad expression and put his arm around her.

"At least she's home now." He said calmly.
"Yes." Liara said as she leaned onto Austin's shoulder. Alaara also patted Liara on shoulder in comforting way.

"I only served under her for a year, but I've never met or more wiser Matriarch." Said Alaara calmly.

"Thank you Alaara. That means a lot." Said Liara.

The funeral home was filled to the brim; a load on Asari and a few non Asari entering and leaving, some hugging, other's crying and most standing in silence to offer their condolences. The majority of the crowd was made up of Benezia's former followers and friends; every member that ever served beneath her was there, taking turns to hug her daughter and offer their sincerest apologies for her loss.

Under request from Liara, the special preservation chamber that Austin had put Benezia's body in would remain sealed and she would forever remain preserved. Something that Austin had been only too happy to agree with since it was also how the Arkanes and the Helldivers buried their best soldiers.

Liara walked up to the coffin that contained her mother's preserved body. Although she had had plenty of time to get over her mother's death, she still couldn't hold back her tears. She covered her eyes with a hand, hiding her face as Austin gently stroked her back. Eventually Liara turned around and buried her face into the crook of her lover's neck as Austin closed his arms around her and held her tight.

"It's alright, Liara… just let it out" se soothed, slowly rubbing her back.

"I thought I'd be alright. I-I thought-"

"Shhhhhhh."

The crowd was soon seated, bowing their heads in respect as the preacher stood above the casket, reminiscing about the strength and determination of the Matriarch she had been honoured to know. Liara sat up front, shifting in her seat as Austin held her hand. It was moments like these that time just seemed to crawl slowly by. After detailing the many sacrifices and heroic deeds of her mother, the preacher finally relinquished, and stepped down.

"If anyone would like to say a few words, please feel free to step forth."

Austin turned to Liara.

"I did prepare something, but I don't think I have the strength to read it." Said Liara. She was still in tears.

"Why don't I read it with you?" Austin suggested calmly.

Liara nodded and the two lovers stood up. Some of the crowd murmured a bit as they saw Benezia's daughter step up to the stand with another. Austin stood behind the podium while Liara stood next to him. She handed him the speech she had prepared. Austin then cleared his throat and spoke.

"For those of you who do not know me, my name is Captain Austin Shepard of the Helldivers. As her lover and bond mate, Liara has agreed to let me speak for her." He said.

Some of the crowd gave a very quiet clap for Liara at least having a bond mate. Austin then went to reading the speech that Liara wrote.
"We live in an age of darkness. A galaxy full of fear, hate and intolerance. But in every age, there are those who fight against it. Lady Benezia T'soni was born almost a thousand years ago into a divided galaxy. A galaxy that she not only tried to heal but unite. A mission that sadly, she never saw accomplished. It would seem that it is the destiny of many great ones to see their goals unfulfilled. But their legacy lives on, and that legacy is used to eventually see that goal fulfilled. Even in death, Benezia will forever be remembered as a symbol to the Asari." He said. He then paused and decided to add in a small bit himself.

"Many believe that Benezia became an enemy by allying herself with Saren Arterius. While that fact is true, it is not the full truth. The Citadel Council themselves would not wish me to say this, nor would they believe it. But to not say it would be an insult to the Matriarch's memory. Her mind was not her own. Saren Arterius was a conflicted and powerful individual. Benezia felt that she could show him the right path. Her intentions for joining him where noble, sadly that choice led to her Indoctrination at the hands of the Reaper Sovereign. Despite this control however, she eventually broke free, and her last moments she redeemed herself by not only helping us to stop Saren, but also making peace with Liara. It's fair to say that without her, a lot of us would not even be here today to say goodbye to her. For that, we should all be grateful. Benezia is just as much the hero as I am, maybe even more than that." He said. He quickly caught a glimpse of Liara's smile. He could also see that the speech was bringing a few happy tears to everyone's eyes. Only Sandra and Alaara weren't crying. But they did looks of sorrow on their faces and where holding each other's hands tightly. Before he could read again, Liara stepped up and said that she felt she could finish the speech. Austin nodded and stepped down. Liara then took over.

"Benezia was more than a leader, more than a teacher, and more than a wise Matriarch. She was also a dear mother. When I was afraid, she would give me strength. And although that I am alone, she has given me a new family." Said Liara. She looked at Austin and smiled slightly at him as he said the last bit. Her lover smiled back.

"She may be gone, but her teachings, guidance, wisdom and strength live on through all of us. Wherever we may go, we must carry on her vision, a vision of a galaxy of peace. "I can't say I know for sure where she is now in the embrace of the Goddess, but I do know that she's looking down. She always hated war; hated everything about it, and I know for a fact that she's smiling at all of us finally living in the peace we all fought so hard to have. But wherever she is, whatever she's doing, she already knows what her little wing is about to say. I love you mother, forever and always."

"You did well, Liara. It took great courage to say all that." Said Austin as he held Liara's hand.

"I couldn't have found that courage without you, my love. What you said about her, thank you." Said Liara.

"I'm sure your mother's still proud of you. The dead do not weep, nor do they suffer" said Austin as he recited another one of his mentor's wise sayings.

"No, but the living do." Said Liara.

"Yes, but the living will grow stronger from it. Your mother was an honourable woman and I am sorry I did not get to know her." Said Austin.

Liara leaned back in her seat, stretching her legs out as she laid her head on her lover's shoulder. Austin stroked her head crest as she did.

"Thank you Liara" he murmured, closing her eyes.
"For what?"

"For just being you. For making me follow my heart to the right place."

"I wouldn't be who I am without you, Austin."

Their lips locked as Austin leaned forward. His heart's frantic beating had finally stilled.

"Let's go finish this."

The ride back to the apartment where they would be staying was a brief one. Since they didn't have anything vital to do, both Liar and Austin had decided to spend a week or so on Thessia. Finding somewhere to stay hadn't been difficult. All of Benezia's belongings now belonged to Liara, so therefore they now had her old home all to themselves. This was the first time since she had left to study at university that she had returned.

It was a calm, warm night and she moved silently behind Austin, pressing her naked breasts into his back, both of them similarly devoid of garments as they always slept together nude. He let out a satisfied and more importantly relaxed sigh at the pleasurable surprise of Liara's body pressed against his.

"Feeling better?" she queried softly.

"Much. Now especially" and to emphasise his point he slid a back, caressing her strong thigh, moving slowly up towards his favourite spot: those glorious blue mounds that were Liara's buttocks.

"Thank you for bringing me out here Liara. I needed this."

"It was my pleasure, Shepard. Besides, I wanted you to see our home mother left us, and show you where I grew up."

Austin looked around for a moment. "It's just the same as the memories we shared during our Union." He said.

A seductive smile crept onto Liara's face. Austin knew that look. It was her "Let's have sex." Look. It was becoming a lot more common these days.

"Speaking of which… we haven't had a Union for weeks now." She said.

"I was beginning to think you'd ever ask." Said Austin as Liara lay on top of him and looked deep into his eyes.

"I love you, Austin." She said.

"I love you too, Liara." Said Austin as he began to massage her breasts.

"Show me." Said Liara. With that, her eyes went completely black.

"Embrace Eternity!"

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Epilogue:

The Citadel tower was still being cleared of all the debris, the remains of Sovereign and the bodies of the Geth and the Helldivers. At the moment, there was only one C-sec officer in the entire office. All
the others where in the Council Chambers cleaning everything up. All he was doing was just going over the reports of the clean-up. He was currently on break and he'd return in a minute. As he continued his drink his data pad bleeped. He picked it up and read the message.

"Report: All Helldiver and C-sec bodies have been recovered. Regarding the Geth bodies however, we seem to be missing one." Said the report.

The C-sec officer didn't seem surprised. He typed in a reply message. "Which Geth do we appear to be missing then? If it's a simple soldier will find it in minutes."

There was a small pause before reply came back.

"No! We've counted all the soldiers and all other normal Geth. The one we still haven't found yet is the mutated Geth prime leader, otherwise known as the Terror Geth. We've searched the tower completely and there's no sign of the body." It said.

The officer then started to worry slightly. "Wasn't that the one that Commander Shepard killed? The one who had its eyes stalk ripped out?" he typed.

There was another brief pause, and then a reply. "Yes. And if there's one thing I know, if there's no corpse, they guy's still alive." Said the message.

Just as the officer got out of his chair, all the lights in his office suddenly went out. The officer looked around in fright. Only too late did he notice a massive, headless, and heavily damaged but still functional Geth body lunge at him…

To be Continued…

Coming soon… Mass Effect 2, The Helldiver Saga, The Collector War

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YES! My very first fanfiction, finished!

Okay, you can expect that Shiala sex fic I mentioned about to be uploaded in a few days. After that, I'm gonna take a small break from writing. Rest assured though, writing for Mass Effect 2 will begin at the start of June.

I hope you've enjoyed reading this story as much as I've enjoyed writing it. See you soon!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!