

Mass Effect: Final Error (Chapters 35-37)

Novus Peregrine

Chapter 35: Impatience

Oriana sighed, pulling her hands away from her keyboard as she gave into the distraction that was Alliana spinning on her heel yet again, restlessly pacing their War Room like a caged lioness. Ori, Liara and Kelly had all three tried to distract the redhead over the last several days, with only Kelly actually managing to succeed in any meaningful way. Even then, Shepard's assistant had needed to play dirty, ambushing Shepard in the shower and getting her tongue into play before Alliana had gotten a chance to react. Once that woman got a tongue in intimate places, even someone as frazzled and jumpy as Shepard currently was hadn't been able to say 'no.' It had bought them all of two hours of relief, despite Kelly's best efforts to drag things out. Shepard had simply outlasted her, then gone back to her anxious pacing and obsessive details watching in the War Room. Time for Oriana to at least *try* again, she supposed.

"You know they won't let us deploy until something *really* goes to shit, Shepard. You should be grateful nothing like that has happened yet. Enjoy it before the chaos *really* starts. Fuck Liara's brains into mush, have a drink with Samara, see if you can get into Tali's suit. Live a little, for we all might die horribly tomorrow, as it were."

Alliana turned to look with her, scowling for a moment...before Oriana's 'nope' face turned that scowl into a pout. That pout made Ori's lips twitch at the corners, despite the situation. The temptation to smile was lost as Alliana sighed in resignation, hands coming up to run through her hair in a harassed gesture she rarely let anyone see.

"I *know*. Trust me, I know. Fuck, I even agree with it! If we take the *Pheonix* and going haring off after every small Reaper sighting, or even join in one of the protracted space battles that have been ongoing since Day 2, we're likely to be in the wrong place at the wrong time just when we're needed elsewhere!"

She flopped down on one of the War Room's chairs, throwing an arm over her eyes, and continued.

"But I can't *stand* this. The Reapers are here! People are already dying by the tens of thousands. Not just military, but civilians! And...I'm doing nothing." A slight amount of bitterness crept into her voice. "At least you and Liara are both still contributing, helping the various science and engineering teams. Not to mention consulting for the Think Tank."

Oriana frowned. Two could play at that game.

"And you aren't? I know perfectly well that you're still liaising with the Quarian and Geth. Not to mention contributing to the Ground Tactics subsection of the Anti-Reaper Think Tank. Don't think I didn't catch you using your own businesses and our Broker access to shift around relief supplies and help people get to the various Refuge systems, too. Hell, those systems were almost entirely your idea in the first place."

A brilliant idea it had been, too. Shepard had suggested, all on her own, that they use the site of the Prometheus drone that had failed in its early stages as a hidden refuge world. The drone itself might have been wiped out by a freak meteor strike, but it had been operational for a couple of decades before its core intelligence had been wiped out. During that time, as part of its programmed build-up, it had created a massive underground complex and numerous worker remotes. Worker remotes that had kept right on digging for material when the central intelligence got slagged. While Oriana had long ago removed the admittedly impressive haul of materials those worker bots had mined and refined for use in other projects, the complex of underground mining tunnels and storage bays hadn't been put to use. By design, the locations of Prometheus Drones were *extremely* remote. Making the facilities impractical for...basically anything.

Almost anything.

Alliana had been the one to realize that the site *didn't appear on any records*, and was large enough to house literally millions of people. Quiet, completely off-the-books conversion of the beyond-backwater facilities there had created the first Refuge. Other efforts, all of them kept off any sort of official documentation the Reapers might get ahold of, had eventually created a half dozen similar facilities. All of them were extremely remote and cut off, all of them specifically designed not to have any outside contact until the Reaper war was over. The smallest housed nearly three million sentients, all carefully skimmed from refugee groups, and none of them had any way to broadcast *anything* outward. Each had a one-way Quantum Comm, specifically designed never to be able to broadcast. Those in charge of the Refuge worlds would have an excellent idea what was going on in the rest of the galaxy...but no one in the rest of the galaxy had a clue what was going on in each Refuge. No single person, not even Shepard or Oriana, knew where *all* of them were, either.

It was contingency planning, of course. Much like the failed efforts of the Protheans at saving some of their best via stasis pods. There were similar chances for the Refuges to fail, but it was likely at least *one* of them would escape the Reapers' notice. If the worst happened and they lost the war, the next cycle would have thousands of years to rebuild from those Refuges and hit the Reapers while they were hibernating in Dark Space. Though, of course, everyone hoped it wouldn't come to that. Saving millions of people was sadly small potatoes if you lost literally trillions of others doing so.

"That's...not the same, Ori. I'm not a number cruncher. I'm supposed to be on the Ground, making things explode. It's what I'm best at...and there are *lot* of things that need to be made to explode right now!"

Oriana shook her head with a fond smile. Alliana was far more than the soldier she tried to pretend she was. Even if her lover wished for things to be that simple, it was the longing of someone *good* at maneuvering through the complex. The longing to put down the metaphorical live grenades they were juggling and simply *rest*. Oriana knew the feeling, perhaps better than any other living soul in the galaxy. She didn't always handle it well either. Her near-nymphomaniac tendencies were almost certainly the result of attempts to forget for a while. At least according to Kelly. Still, maybe that meant she could help Shepard a bit? Standing, she crossed over to take a chair next to Alliana, resting one hand on her thigh.

“What’s your dream, Shepard? For after all this is over. Pretend for a minute that we all survive, somehow. That we can leave the cleanup of the clusterfuck the galaxy will be to someone else. What would you do with yourself? If you could do anything?”

Alliana’s arm fell away from her eyes to get a look at Oriana. Her face was full of curiosity as she looked into her lover’s eyes.

“I...don’t know? I mean, there’s no way in hell I’d ever be able to settle down. Even assuming the galaxy would let me, I’d go crazy in, like, a year. Maybe...turn the Pheonix into a space harem and go adventuring to find all the most interesting sex toys?”

Oriana couldn’t help it, she giggled at the idea. Still, it was sort of a fun one to contemplate. Not to mention one that would probably help redirect Shepard’s attention...elsewhere.

“Oh? And what would the uniform for the crew be? And who are you keeping on board...”

Alliana grinned, mischief and lust sparking in her eyes as her brain took the suggestion and ran with it.

“Welllll...I think crotchless panties and short skirts are a must. Zippers are tempting, but they can be uncomfortable and inconvenient at the oddest times...”

Chapter 36: Tamaris

Shepard had gotten her wish to be *doing* something entirely too soon for Oriana’s liking. Not because she didn’t feel a similar itch under her skin for action. Even if she *knew* her more strategic contributions were just as critical as any actual fighting she did, in this second life, she’d been personally trained and mentored by Aethyta. The aggressive combat mindset the Matriarch had practically beaten into her, combined with her fears and frustrations from not being able to fight the *first* time around, created an itch for more direct action equal to Shepard’s own. She might be able to suppress that itch with harsh logical and self-discipline better than her lover...but that didn’t mean it wasn’t present.

No. It wasn’t the lack of desire to ‘get stuck in’ that made it entirely too soon for Oriana’s liking. Nor was it any species of fear for herself or her lovers. Instead, it was the understanding that for someone like them to be called upon, *something had to have gone badly wrong*. If it meant nothing going badly enough wrong to call upon the best of the best to fix it, Oriana would have willingly sat out the entire war, no matter how much she itched to *fight*. Instead, it had taken barely two weeks for something to go radically enough tits up that the powers that be had called on the crew of the *Pheonix* to investigate.

Specifically, the Asari colony world of Tamaris had simply...gone dark. Last reports from the colony had been routine, reporting only the same minimal scouting that the Reapers had been doing everywhere. The enemy had shifted to a far more cautious approach to the war after their second bloody nose, just as they’d all wanted. But that approach meant they’d been sending Reaper destroyers in small numbers all over space, in an effort to probe the Citadel Alliance’s defenses. At Terra Nova, Cyone, Erinle, and Taetrus, those defenses had come under concentrated assault waves.

Each was a major world to one or another of the major galactic powers. Important enough to have big defenses built up and critical enough to force the Citadel forces to defend them, tying down major fleet elements even if those elements had so far managed to make the Reapers pay at better than two to one odds. They were aided in that not just by the new weapons systems, but emplaced mine fields and other traps that helped contain the fighting mostly to the Relays. Meanwhile, more tragically, other systems and worlds had fallen to the Reapers outright. Worlds like Halegeuse, Chalkhos, and Altakiril had all been hit too hard and fast to hold, but had gone down fighting and making the Reapers pay for the systems.

Tamaris, however, hadn't broadcast a single word about being invaded. Yet all information, even by quantum entangled comm, had stopped flowing overnight. Given the level of caution the Citadel Alliance had employed to make colonies just *vanishing* like that effectively impossible, there was no question that it demanded investigation. Unfortunately, the initial attempt to investigate had been done by a STG stealth frigate...that had promptly discovered the Reapers present in the system. That might have been the end of it, if there was any explanation for how it had happened. But the STG team had spotted only relatively minor Reaper forces *on the ground* and virtually none in Orbit. There was a debris field where the system picket should have been...and no other signs of orbital struggle at all.

The frightening conclusion that command had come to, given the handful of Reapers clearly on the ground and harvesting locals, was that somehow the defenses had been used *against* the picket ships. The most likely answer was indoctrination. But steps had been taken to build scanners to detect that, using the Prothean method from Ilos. Every core command center of any world had those scanners emplaced before the Reapers arrived. No exceptions. And all of the workers that had installed them had, themselves, been scanned.

If they Reapers had found a way around those scanners, command needed to know *now*. Which is why the *Pheonix* had been dispatched, with orders to sneak into the system ahead of a small fleet. Their goal was to find out what had happened if they could, then recapture or disable the ground defenses that were still online. The fleet would sweep in behind them to recapture the system, since the Reapers weren't actually defending it heavily enough to prevent that. With the ground systems still undamaged and the light enemy forces present, there was every reason to attempt to retake the world instead of writing it off. Particularly in the event that the initial ground team couldn't figure out what had caused the system to fall in the first place, as they'd then need to go over the people and equipment with a fine-toothed comb until they were sure it couldn't be repeated on other worlds.

All of which explained Oriana's current circumstances. While certainly capable of it, Shepard wasn't really a 'stealth' sort of person by natural inclination. Which had led her to taking one of the two heavy teams that were aimed to hit the primary and backup control stations for the ground-to-orbit weapons emplacements. Shepard had taken one of their Asari commando squads, along with Kaidan, Gestalt and Jack. The last had been folded into their ground teams relatively recently. She'd needed new direction after Cerberus was done away with, and seemed to have grown *attached* to Oriana's sister in ways that Ori was determined to remain ignorant of as long as possible. Figuring out how to wage an impossible war was much easier than sorting out who, exactly, would wear the metaphorical pants in *that* relationship...

Meanwhile, Ashley, still assigned to the *Pheonix* for now, had taken the other 'heavy' team. It consisted of the other commando team, Tali, Jacob Taylor, and James Vega. Jacob had been some

hangar on of her sister's she'd salvaged from Cerberus when she defected. While James was a sort of poster boy forwarded from the Systems Alliance to Ashley's 'command' for visibility, but competent enough for all of that. Both teams were loaded for bear and would make wonderful distractions when they hit the control stations.

Unfortunately, that had left *Oriana* in charge of the most nerve-wrackingly critical part of this entire operation. With her were Samara, Kasumi, Miranda and Liara. A five-woman team intended for stealth and technical/scientific expertise. Somehow, mostly by the grace of Kasumi's scouting and Samara being a brutally efficient ambush predator, the five had managed to get nearly to the military high command post for Tamaris without alerting the Reapers. The command post was the one place that *had* to have fallen to some sort of inside betrayal, as it was the location of the highly-secured Quantum-Entangled Comm set that *should* have warned the powers that be of any Reaper threat to the system. It was also supposed to have multiple layers of indoctrination detection, leaving everyone baffled about just how the planet had fallen.

As she watched from her position a level above the entrance they wanted to use, Oriana grimaced. The well-designed defensive structure was working against them now. They could get no farther without going loud. Which meant it was time to call in the diversions. Making hand signs to her team, she activated their heavily encrypted short-ranged comms for the first time since starting the op.

"Shadow team in position. Check in."

Shepard's voice came across first, in immediate response.

"Sword in position. Ready to kick off."

Ashley's own response was only a moment later in coming, having waited just long enough for Shepard to sound off first.

"Lance is position. Go for operation."

Oriana sighed in relief. Their teams hadn't had anywhere near as difficult of approaches to their own targets...but the larger teams were a lot less stealthy too. Thankfully, so far, the basic ops plan wasn't *completely* fucked sideways. Though that would probably change in the next few minutes, given their usual luck.

"Execute. I say again, Execute."

There was only the tiniest of hesitation before the response came. Two voices acknowledging the order...and then the sounds of heavy ordinance going off from two directions halfway across the city. Those weren't the main attacks, of course. Just distractions for the distractions, and Oriana waited impatiently for the reaction to first the explosions...and then the strikes by the two assault teams that would be hitting two entirely different locations, away from those initial explosions, in another five minutes.

Thankfully, the impatient minutes of waiting bore fruit. One thing that the Military Think Tank had realized in picking apart Oriana's memories, then confirmed when the actual shooting started, was that the Reapers actually *sucked* at Ground Warfare. Once they'd realized it, the reasons objectively made a sort of sick sense. Reapers didn't engage in Ground Warfare at all, save through proxies or as fire

support with their smaller ships. Instead, they relied on quantity over quality in the form of massive numbers of husks, controlled by whichever species they could best twist into slightly more capable 'command' units. Worse for the Reapers, the composition of their 'ground' forces would be radically different every cycle, and it took some time for them to adjust. The longer they had to work with, the better they would be at using their disposable troops. Until then, though, even with some indoctrinated minds helping them, they were *clumsy*.

They were already using 'Maurders,' Reaperfied-Turians, as local command forces. Just as they had in Oriana's first life. But Tamaris was an *Asari* world. There hadn't been very many Turians for them to harvest here, and they didn't seem to have figured out how to do anything more than Husk Asari yet. Even the dreaded Banshee units had yet to appear...and might not do so in more than tiny numbers. A benefit of Oriana's people having made a vaccine for the latent condition that allowed them to exist. Since the Asari Republics had pushed *hard* over the last few years to get as many people vaccinated as possible, despite the stigma of the Ardant-Yakshi condition, it was entirely possible the Reapers wouldn't find enough of them to come up with that unit at all. It could be hoped, at least, given how devastating they were.

All of the bits and pieces added together here on Tamaris to an ideal set of circumstances for what they'd just done. Kick the beehive, let the bees swarm...and slip in the back once most of them moved off your actual objective. It had worked, too. Almost immediately, a few Marauders and several indoctrinated Asari had poured out of the command post. Then a second set had left five minutes later when the two assault teams joined in on their real targets. A worrying number of husks were headed in those directions, but that was Ashley and Shepard's problem. Oriana waited only two more minutes before dropping her hand from where she'd been holding it up in a fist.

Freed from the 'hold' signal, Samara was the first to act, biotically charging the door they intended to use. That door was heavily armored...but very, very few things were heavily armored enough to stop a charging Justicar. Let alone one of Samara's age and sheer power. The door gave way with a hideous shriek, Oriana and Liara following the older Biotic's charge seconds later to complete their breach into the building. Kasumi and Miranda followed more slowly...and began deploying the portable sentry turrets they'd brought to temporarily re-secure the breached entrance behind them. They needed to actually *hold* this place until the Fleet arrived, after all. If they could.

As they advanced, they advanced into total chaos. There were plenty of husks here, but only one or two larger units, and barely a handful of Marauders. It was the single indoctrinated Asari, however, that captured Oriana's attention.

"Fuck!"

Liara, ripping another husk apart with her biotics, eyed the same woman.

"Yes. That's an accurate summation. That's the mayor, isn't it?"

Oriana snarled, even as she channeled her anger into a particularly large biotic detonation, pushing to close with the indoctrinated Asari.

“Yes! And all officials of that level are scanned twice a month! Either she succumbed between scans, which *should* be way too fast without obvious behavior changes, or something else screwy is going on here!”

No one replied as a number of equally bad options flashed through their minds. Everyone pushed harder. They needed to take this place as intact as possible, if they wanted to figure out what had happened. Something which became a lot harder, all of a sudden, as one of the three Reaper destroyers around the city seemed to finally take notice of what was going on...

They hadn't been able to take the command post intact. Once the Reapers got directly involved, they'd destroyed a large chunk of it despite its hardened defenses. Thankfully, by the time they'd realized the need, Kasumi and Miranda had managed a data dump on about 45% of the command posts data for the last three weeks. Even better, they'd taken the indoctrinated mayor alive. That *wasn't* standard operating procedure, but it had been anticipated early on in the war planning that it could be...a useful tactic. Mostly because of the Thorian. There were some serious ethical issues in handing someone over to the Thorian to essentially overwrite one mind control with another...but in the right circumstances it had been deemed justified. Indeed, some had argued for *all* captured indoctrination victims to be given over to it. Cooler heads had prevailed in the end. Mostly, it had to be admitted, because they were worried what would happen to the *Thorian* if they gave it too many such people. If it became indoctrinated itself by the exposure, that would be a disaster of truly epic proportions.

In the end, Tamaris had been retaken, and they were confident they would get the information about how it had fallen before it could happen again elsewhere. It was even, grisly as it was, useful in another way as well. It was the first time they'd taken a 'Harvesting' facility intact. Which they hoped would fill critical gaps in their understanding of the Reapers. Not to mention being grist for the war propaganda office. Convincing *civilians* that they should fight to the last ditch instead of surrender went against the grain for most non-Turian cultures. But it still beat leaving them to be funneled into the creation of yet more Reapers and Husks. Cold logic. Brutal even. But something that couldn't be turned away from.

The war had only been going on for a little over three weeks now. All of them suspected there would be far too many such decisions left to make...

Chapter 37: Rewarding a Job Well Done

Oriana was embarrassed just how long it had taken to figure out the secret to Kelly's oral skills. Admittedly, Kelly was simply *good* at oral. As in, on par with any Asari Oriana had ever been with, despite centuries more experience in the case of some of those Asari. But, unlike those Asari, Kelly had a little secret that she'd failed to mention. At least until Oriana had finally thought to ask her about it directly. The little imp had promptly stuck out her tongue...and commanded the *implant* inside it to vibrate as strongly as it could.

The mischievous grin on the redhead's face had told Oriana all she needed to know. Kelly had deliberately chosen to use the implant, which had an impressive number of features, in the most subtle ways possible, waiting to see how long it would take one of her bosses-cum-mistresses to realize something was up. Ori had, of course, immediately punished her by sticking her in a chastity belt for a

month and demanding that Kelly earn any pleasure or release by showing off the *full* range of the implant's features. That had been over a year ago now, but the redhead and her skills was on Oriana's mind today for a very specific reason.

She needed to reward Samara.

Seriously. The Justicar had proven just how *insanely* good she was on Tamaris. To the point that Oriana had come to the conclusion that the woman was actually *more* dangerous than Matriarch Aethyta. Who had been, until this latest mission, Oriana's meter-stick for 'badass.' Even with all the things both she and Shepard had accomplished in the last few years, the combination of sheer power and lethal experience Aethyta had shown against Saren and the Heretics on Eden Prime had left a lasting impression. Yet, on Tamaris, Samara had proven to be *at least* as skilled...and considerably stronger.

Even what Oriana had seen from her against Morinth hadn't prepared her for it. Mostly because that fight had been more a biotic slugging match than an exercise in skill. Morinth and Samara had *both* been so powerful that the power fluxing between them had made skill a distinctly secondary concern. Not so on Tamaris, where Samara had shown a stupidly impressive range, from silent ambush predator to viciously skilled commando, and ending in hilariously powerful biotic that managed to *deflect* the main gun of a Reaper. Only a destroyer, sure. And she'd *deflected* it rather than outright stopping it. But managing even that much was the sort of thing outright legends were made of. It had also, not incidentally, saved all of their lives.

All of which led to the desire to reward Samara. The problem with that, of course, was that the Justicar wouldn't accept anything that was a *reward* simply for doing what she'd felt was right. Which meant it was time to be *creative*. They'd had 'fun' together several times since their first post-Morinth night of passion. But Samara wasn't a maiden, or even a matron. Her need or desire for the sort of kinky, nymphomaniac experiences that Ori put the rest of her lovers through was long sated. Indeed, the only person she'd previously been able to bring into even a simple threesome with the Justicar was Liara. And that had been the bemused elder Asari helping to educate Liara on some Asari-specific sexual culture and experiences that Oriana didn't fully grasp. The Justicar had clearly enjoyed herself, but it hadn't been any greater than her enjoyment with just Oriana alone. Though poor Liara had been just about comatose after each of the half dozen occasions Ori had brought her along. Apparently, for an Asari, joining with an elder Asari was much *more* than with others, in a way that even Oriana's altered physiology couldn't replicate.

With all of that that in mind. Oriana had decided it was thus time to deploy the secret weapon that was Kelly. Someone who could match up to the oral skills of Asari centuries older than her as a starting point, and then amplify that with an *extremely* impressive implant. All that was left to do was make the arrangements. Including getting Samara to agree, or at least not protest when it was sprung on her...

Samara *writhed*, eyes pitch-black as she nearly failed to hold her meld with Oriana. Ori projected pure smugness into the meld, even as Samara's will faltered and Oriana took full control of the joining. That was only possible at all because of the pseudo-Asari anatomy that had been forced on her by the Parallax jump years ago...and she still couldn't initiate them herself. Now, however, she took full

advantage of the delightful things Kelly was doing between Samara's legs to seize control of the joining from the Justicar. Of course, that joining meant that an echo of Kelly's best efforts, currently involving the electro-stim setting of her tongue implant probing the Justicar's insides, were being felt by Oriana as well. And that didn't even mention the more direct stimulation she was getting as she rode the strapon secured to Kelly's hips. Its rough, thick cock scrapped her own insides delightfully, even as it applied friction to Kelly's clit with each of Ori's descents.

Oriana, despite the echo, had the advantage here. Both of being far more active sexually in general, and in having already experienced command performances of all of Kelly's tricks. Even through the echo, they were enough to have Ori barely holding on...but Samara had been completely caught by surprise. The Justicar had been skeptical of the redhead joining them, requiring some earnest and weapons-grade puppy dog eye deployment from Kelly. But once they'd gotten her into bed with them, the far older, more experienced, Justicar had been utterly unprepared for Kelly. Just Kelly's magic tongue alone had impressed the older woman...but then the redhead had begun cycling through her implant's functions, and the elder Asari had come unglued.

For the first time, Oriana was getting to see the expressions Samara made when she was *genuinely* out of control, cumming her brains out repeatedly under the onslaught from every direction. An onslaught that was about to get worse as Oriana took advantage of her control of the joining to pull the Asari woman through a highlight reel of her own more extreme encounters. Ori's control frayed moments in as her body overrode her mind, coming down with a final hard thrust and clenching down spasmodically on the strapon as her whole body shuddered through climax.

Yet Samara was too distracted to take back control, so Oriana continued to pull their shared mental presence through the sea of experiences her own nymphomaniac lifestyle had given her. Every time she felt a pulse of echoing memory from one experience or another, Oriana detoured into the related memory, the Justicar's memories from much younger days. She watched, semi-experiencing the half-alien pleasures of an Asari coupling as much-younger-Samara slept her way around the galaxy. Hopping from kinky encounter to kinky encounter in her maiden years, then shacking up with other matrons in her matron days. Ori steered well clear of the bulk of the latter, afraid of bringing up the pain of Samara's children, instead towing the Justicar back through her own debaucheries whenever she sensed a painful memory near.

For how long they swam through the memories of wild sex, Ori didn't know, she even lost track of the number of climaxes sweeping through them both as a giggling Kelly played freely with their distracted bodies, adding to the pleasure for both of them. Finally, despite all she could do, the connection broke...and both of them lay there gasping and panting. They were both on their backs now, Kelly fingering Oriana through one more climax even as she renewed her oral assault on Samara's azure. Moments later, they both came a final time, before weakly pushing the insatiable sex-demi-goddess of a redhead away. The synchrony of the action woke a bit of amusement in Oriana, even as she flopped her head sideways to look over at Samara.

"Have fun?"

After several shuddering breaths, Samara turned to weakly meet her eyes.

“One might say that. One might also say that I think you managed to reawaken some curiosity. Perhaps next time, we can try these electro-stimulators and chastity belts of yours? I don’t believe I ever tried long-term teasing like that before...”

Oriana’s eyes almost popped out of her head in surprise, but a grin slowly spread across her face as Samara’s desire to experiment sunk in.

“I do believe we can manage that, yes. Perhaps we’ll even come up with a few fun games to play, to keep it new...”

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