

Nestra was excited. Not only was Camille a great adversary, but they were also cool as a person and now they were going to get adventures together! Not now, though, because it would be a bad time to get caught sneaking out. With the stew consumed and the leftover properly packed (and labeled), Nestra slipped out of the world while Camille simply walked through the entrance portal. The aperture was in full view of the cabin, but Camille had a great disguise: they were simply not wearing their mask.

It was kind of crazy how the mask became an identity and the lack thereof, anonymity. Actually, Crescent was much more famous than Nestra, even, so that was the same thing. With a last smile, Nestra walked through the tarp into her allocated bedroom to find that nothing had changed. It just smelled a bit like rank plastic but she'd live with it. With her stomach full and a bit of blood loss, she easily fell asleep.

The next morning, neither Weiwei nor Derek showed any sign that they'd noticed her leaving. That almost annoyed her. Weren't people supposed to check on someone with a cranial trauma? To see if there was anything bad happening? Well, they weren't doctors so whatever. Maybe they'd preferred to let her sleep.

"My fortune for fresh coffee," Nestra announced.

Derek looked up from their breakfast table. Those looked like military rations. Some Threshold-issued rations were pretty tasty.

"You look much better. Unfortunately, I would recommend against caffeine with a healing wound."

"It's almost fully healed!" Nestra protested.

And indeed, the small mirror showed only an angry puffy red line where she once had a hole in her skull.

"Operative word: almost."

"Maybe..." Weiwei started.

A yawn interrupted her. It lasted a solid three seconds.

"Maybe let her? I need some help."

"Oh fine. In the meanwhile, have a seat. I was reviewing the footage of yesterday's vid. There is no doubt that the trap was well hidden..."

"Can I see?" Nestra asked, curious.

"Sending it to your visor."

The scene was a messy one, which turned out to be a blessing. Derek apparently cycled through various sights every time he entered or exited a place, and they'd detected some temperature difference that had made him suspicious. He'd jumped before the explosion. There was precious little to see because he'd been looking away from her. Additionally, the glitches from her true form came with a flurry of angry red notifications and other distortions. It looked like she was in the clear. Fascinated, she kept watching him carry her in. He'd looked down with worry. Half her face had been a pale, lost mask, and the rest had been covered in this blood. She got his fear now. It really looked like she was mortally hit.

A part of her looked on the following surgery with a certain fondness. Threshold's cavernous archives would henceforth and forever carry irrefutable proof that Nestra did, in fact, have a brain. Despite some passing evidence to the contrary. Arguably, Derek had had to zoom but whatever.

She finished sipping her coffee while looking at the man awkwardly checking that her skull was properly fused. She'd looked so calm it was kind of weird.

Someone was still going to pay for this, of course, but for now, she was stuck until evening.

By noon, Nestra was feeling cramped in the cabin with little to do and a constant need for low-attention vigilance. A pair of red-robed teens came to check on them for lunch, bringing stew they'd made themselves. Nestra opened the door against Derek's advice. The enclavers recoiled when they saw she was hurt.

"Is... everything alright?" the man asked while handing her a bowl.

His English was hesitant but it was clear he was putting a lot of effort into it.

"Someone trapped the garden. I was hurt," Nestra said.

Then she gauged their reaction.

The woman who'd stayed a little bit behind out of embarrassment looked horrified. The guy went through several stages of grief and horror, the kind experienced by people who realize that their side just started something that might be a tad hard to finish.

"Ah, hm, it is, that is, I'm sure, errr, perhaps I should... I will let my mentor know."

Ah, the time-honored tradition of kicking stinkers up the chain of command. It reinforced Nestra's opinion that this might have been splinter elements. She tossed two of her nicer chocolate bars to the enclavers as a gesture for the stew, then went back in.

"How can you be sure those are splinter elements," Derek grumbled. "Also, you really shouldn't be eating that stew."

"It's homemade chili. It's pretty good!"

"It could be poisoned."

“I need the mana and nutrients. No, seriously, I really do.”

Nestra moved her spoon around like a conductor’s baton.

“It’s a splinter element because we’re still alive. If the enclavers wanted us dead, we’d be dead, so it can’t be all of them. The tool is also a trap that already blew up: a perfect tool for those who want to remain anonymous. And their anonymity was so important to them that they didn’t come to finish the job. And they could have. An arrow, hell, even a knife throw would have been enough to finish us both. Now look.”

Nestra pointed at the cameras. Enclavers were forming a protective barrier around the tent, looking outward. Whoever was responsible for their security knew they were going to be a big trouble so at least they were acting more seriously now.

“Give me a second,” Derek said, before leaving to tell those who’d approached the garden to fuck off.

“There might be more traps,” the man Nestra’s talked to objected.

“It’s a crime scene,” Derek retorted.

“Oh, like in the vids.”

“Yes, just so.”

The conversation was cut short, mostly due to mutual mistrust between the two parties. This left the Thresholders in a rather awkward position until nightfall. Should they risk leaving the tent now? Nestra was getting an itchy soul, but Derek argued that her mental health would hold for another day until the expedition returned and the situation was resolved.

“Why can’t we send a runner to Ilar and Watanabe?” Weiwei asked.

“It’s too risky for the C-class folks here.”

“The portal world is not just dangerous, it’s also fairly large,” Nestra added. “By the time a messenger reaches them, they will have mostly closed the portal anyway. If one manages to reach them.”

No matter how safe portals could be made, there were often stragglers, which was why raiders stayed with the resource-collecting gleams in large portal worlds. She wasn’t sure Derek was right about a messenger not making things faster. She just wasn’t willing to have someone risk their lives for her comfort.

At least, now she could stick to her natural sleep schedule without it being weird. The other two just assumed she was recuperating.

Also, that stew was pretty good.

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“You know, police girl, sneaking around with shadow mana is less effective when you’re singing the ‘Spy Gleam’ main theme out loud,” Fox Mask said tiredly.

The mysterious gleam stood under the moonlight at the edge of the jungle, far from the semi-permanent cabins of their compatriots.

“First, call me Crescent when we’re in our gleamsonas,” Nesta corrected.

“I am reconsidering our cooperation.”

“And second, I just wanted to match your style.”

Nesta shook her visor in front of Camille’s face, or rather their very obvious Fox Mask which, upon closer observation, needed to be replaced. It was cracked and faded.

On the visor was a short message sent to Nesta’s visor via secured bluetooth. It was signed with a fox emoji.

“That’s your call sign? Really?”

“You yourself called me Fox Mask. I thought it would be appropriate.”

“Alright. The Fox Mask opens the masquerade, repeat, the Fox Mask opens the masquerade, over, ksh.”

“For the love of... you remember, *Crescent*, that we are here to stop a war?”

“I know! Isn’t this exciting — it’s people you know whose lives are at risk, sorry,” Nesta said, though she didn’t really mean it that much.

She didn’t really care about the enclavers. Her interest was for Fox Mask, their skill, their progress. Their delicious rivalry. That sweet, growing core she could harvest some time... no, no. No eating the friends. A rivalry had to be alive to be kept.

But if she overtook Camille to the extent that the human could no longer match her prowess, shouldn’t she kill them? Take the core for her own, so that a piece of that memory got carried with her forever? A long fight, a bitter race with only one winner at the end, one who would swallow the defeated to grow even stronger...

Nesta licked her lips, then frowned. Her true form had conflicting feelings about the whole issue... or perhaps her human side was refusing the Aszhii side its snack, preferring pack bonding instead. Very weird. Anyway, no eating Camille. It just wouldn’t be right.

Unless they were dying, of course. Independently of her.

“Are you... hungry?” they asked.

“What? No. A little bit? I want to kill monsters but we’re busy right now. Speaking of, how do we stop the coup? I hope you have a plan because enclave politics isn’t exactly my specialty.”

“It’s easy,” Camille started with a cold mastermind kind of voice before toning it down. “Well, not that easy. We need to expose Manh’s duplicity to the Patriarch. I am sure Ong already suspects treachery. The fact he hasn’t moved just means that Manh’s position is endorsed by a significant portion of the Elder Council. No, what we need is to prove treachery.”

“I assume he just doesn’t go around leaving messages on unsecured channels.”

“No, our communication is almost always oral.”

That’s what Nestra figured.

“However, there is one channel where written evidence must be kept.”

“Money?”

“Why, yes, absolutely. Very astute,” Camille said, sounding pleasantly surprised.

Nestra pointed a finger at herself.

“Police girl,” she said.

“Indeed. Well, as you might have surmised, the enclave has a... secret warehouse.”

“Where you keep your stolen shit. We’re looking for it.”

Camille grew distinctly uncomfortable behind their mask.

“As I said before, I expect a reckoning and I will not warn my people. There wouldn’t be enough time for them to move all the goods anyway... and I am not betraying them since you already know about the thefts...”

It sounded like Camille was trying to convince themselves, Nestra thought.

“The warehouse containing the stolen goods lies below the compound.”

“Below? You have secret caves?”

It would be kind of cool.

“Not secret caves,” Camille replied, testily. “The Sword Kings have been digging for decades. There are facilities, dormitories, shelters, and warehouses below ground. Mostly, those facilities remain unused outside of emergencies because people like the sun, but the

warehouses are the exception. Elders have their own vaults where they store the goods their families have accumulated over the years. The stolen goods warehouses are of no immediate interest to us. What matters is that Manh may have secured goods and artifacts to grant his followers.”

“Really? I didn’t expect your folks to be materialistic.”

“You are thinking too highly of us.”

“I thought hatred and fear would do the trick — no need to add bribery on top of it,” Nestra continued.

“Nevermind,” Camille drily commented. “And this is not to purchase help. If Mahn’s attempt is to succeed, he needs two things: one, Ong needs to be busy, or in a portal, or, or...”

Camille swallowed with difficulty.

“Or disabled. I do not see this succeeding, however. Second, Manh needs to take over the enclave by purging loyalists. For this, he needs people, and his people need an edge.”

“Artifacts?”

“Precisely. While I was... shopping in Threshold...”

The two stared at each other, with Nestra making it abundantly clear she didn’t think much of Camille’s habits.

“Don’t tell me you never stole anything because I wouldn’t believe you,” Camille retorted.

“I did illegal raids,” Nestra said.

And also breaking and entering. Sales of illegally acquired artifacts. Purchase of illegally acquired everything. Possession of unregistered weapons. Assassination, although they had it coming.

“But I never stole stuff,” she finished.

Technically true.

“So let me guess, you also stole artifacts and tools that can be used to give Manh’s faction an edge. Hypothetically.”

“Yes, and I haven’t checked the warehouse, but I wouldn’t be surprised if some of them were missing.”

Nestra thought about it. That would be a good proof, she supposed. There was only one problem.

“We are not at the compound.”

“I know! I know, but according to planning the envoys are supposed to return there tomorrow for relaxation and discussions before heading out to the outskirts.”

“Fair enough. I can infiltrate the warehouse then.”

“I was thinking I was going to have to do it, and I was going to ask for your help.”

“I’m a great infiltrator,” Nestra claimed. “But I’m not a thief like you so sure, let’s do it together!”

“I am not... oh, very well. I will get some plans and we can coordinate tomorrow. That is assuming all goes well. You were, after all, almost murdered.”

“Ilar will make a fuss for sure, because he wants reparations and concessions, but I’m sure it won’t be a huge deal.”

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It was, in fact, a huge deal.

“This is absolutely unacceptable. Do I need to remind you that any attempt on a diplomat is an act of war? One of my people was a victim, not of violence, but of an assassination attempt!”

Ilan was fuming. Both Thresholders and Sword Kings stood on either side of the closed portal in an awkward stand off. It would have been more impressive if Ilar had more than Watanabe to back him up as a B-class raider. By comparison, half a dozen Sword Kings stood at attention, their guards up. Exhaustion made the raiders a little tense. The patriarch himself bristled under the accusation, or perhaps it was him hating his lack of control. Nevertheless, he knew he was in a position of relative weakness.

It was a credit to him that he managed to force a smile out.

“Perhaps we should first ascertain what happens before... throwing accusations.”

“Someone planted a monster-killing trap inside of my people’s living space. There is little room for interpretation.”

Ilar signaled. Derek brought a datasheet with the recorded event. Most of the Sword Kings gathered around the sheet, replaying the event over the next five minutes and passing it along to those who hadn’t seen it yet. It was a testament to how seriously they were taking this that they played it at normal speed. Nestra’s mom tended to watch vids accelerated eight times because her mind had no issue processing it. It was hard to gauge with gleams, but as far as Nestra could tell, they were very annoyed and making no secret as to their feelings.

The Patriarch assured Ilar he would look into the matter. The B-class scattered while the Thresholders gathered together. Once again, a buzz at the edge of Nestra's hearing revealed the activation of a sound-muffling enchantment. This would be a private conversation.

"Agent Palladian, I'll be blunt. Is there anything more you'd like to add that the enclavers might have... missed?"

What the fuck was he on about?

"What do you mean?"

"Are there any specific actions you might have taken, or things you might have observed, that might have led to this specific incident, the discovery of which at a later time might embarrass me?"

"Are you asking if I fucked something up that led to the trap being activated? Something that would make us lose face after?"

Ilar sighed heavily.

"Yes, Palladian, that is exactly what I'm asking."

"Nothing of the sort. We went to the tent as soon as you guys left. It was hot and stuffy inside so I left the place to check the garden with Derek. I felt mana from a specific spot while Derek perceived an abnormal cold spot."

"It happens when soil was recently upturned," Derek explained. "The —"

"I am familiar with the process," Ilar cut. "I just needed confirmation."

"It was ready for us before we even arrived," Nestra explained.

"Yes, very well. Right."

Ilar massaged the bridge of his nose. He looked a little bit worse for wear with some scratches on his armor, a sign he'd fought some of the monsters in person. Nestra wasn't sure why since they had an army of B-class raiders with them — perhaps as a demonstration of force? In any case, he probably needed some rest.

She thought it better to keep her thoughts to herself.

Ilar rolled his shoulders, his gaze still on Nestra like she wasn't the one who'd gotten her skull cracked open. He eventually turned to Nestra.

"What's the likelihood that this was an accident? That someone made a misguided attempt to keep mana rats off the Matriarch's precious rhododendrons?"



“None sir, the trap was deliberately set on the gravel path right next to the tent’s entrance. Even if someone was stupid enough to trap a public spot without notifying visitors, they would have set it outside of the garden next to an obvious entry point in the barrier, or among the most vulnerable flowers... even that would have destroyed them. No, this was meant to catch humans.”

She shrugged.

“It would be hard to justify otherwise.”

“I see. Since the Patriarch *appears* to be willing to grant us justice for this attack, I will not order an immediate evacuation. We will return to the compound and reassess. Ah, it appears our hosts are... bringing... someone?”

They were. It was an older red-robed man who looked both lost and terrified. He wore trapper’s gear on his back. Nestra recognized the wire balls hanging from a bandolier as the payload used to slice her skin open.

“What, really?” she whispered.

The Patriarch, his expression one of thunderous anger, stopped in front of the delegation, dragging the trapper to the front with casual violence. The old man rolled to his knees, expression caught in a mask of abject fear. He planted his face in the soil in a gesture of subservience.

“It appears my men have... erred in their duty. This sentry admitted to planting the trap in a misguided attempt to catch a particularly cunning mana boar. He was out on duty once the news of your coming was announced. Despite being asked to check the perimeter for dangers, he failed to remember to disarm the trap.”

“I am so sorry!” The old man mewled with terror.

Nestra’s visor translated the Vietnamese babble. The man made all sorts of apologies, mostly to the enclave for marring its honor.

“There is only one sentence for those who cause grave harm through their own negligence,” the Patriarch said softly, and the words carried across the silent clearing like a death toll.

They hung in the air. Nestra’s breath hitched in her chest. She knew what this meant. Threshold’s delegation also froze. Chandra made a gesture with her fingers Nestra didn’t recognize.

It was abundantly clear to Nestra that she was looking at a sacrificial lamb. The old man was going to take the fall for a plot that he could not have hatched, and everyone was going to watch. This was just life in the post-Incursion frontier. There was nothing to do.

That annoyed her.

The Patriarch unsheathed his saber, which he'd kept on his back. It was massive, and made of a strange sort of crystal that told Nesta this was a portal-made artifact and probably quite powerful as well. Tears rolled down the trapper's cheek.

"My family," he whispered.

"That fault is yours alone," the patriarch replied, not unkindly.

Oh, fuck it.

"If it's about reparations, I'm fine with him just going to prison," Nesta said.

Her words cut through the heavy silence like a thunderbolt. All attention focused on her. She crossed her arms, daring anyone to comment. They knew it was a setup. At least, they must suspect. They were all going through a farce except the punch line was the death of a person. Yes, he was probably the one who'd set up the trap, but he wasn't the mastermind. Nesta felt oddly annoyed by the circumstances.

"This isn't about you, it is about our laws," the Patriarch chided, and the Elders nodded in approval. "Just like all will come to defend one, the one must protect the whole, or pay for it.

No one from the Threshold side came to her defense. The blade was raised. The trapper gave Nesta one last, unreadable glance. The blade fell. Fresh blood coated the basalt in a shiny coat of red.

It was done.

One of the Elders disappeared and a moment later, a group of red-robed guards descended into the cauldron with a stretcher and a body bag. Nesta stayed where she was while Ilar and the Patriarch discussed what would happen next in private. It was a very short discussion. As soon as it was finished, Ilar grabbed Nesta under his privacy spell again.

"You're acting a bit rashly, Palladian."

"By objecting to an obvious pawn being sacrificed under our eyes?" she objected.

"This is a very delicate moment. We need to present a unified front. You knew you had no chance to save that man."

"No, I didn't know that. The Patriarch could have relented and allowed exile instead. He decided to go with the execution instead. Are you annoyed because I'm making us look bad and undisciplined?"

"Lacking unity, certainly."

"Fuck your unity Ilar. You gave us a grand speech about values before leaving but those went out the window —"

“Don’t you dare! I do not fight hopeless battles, but it doesn’t mean that I approve of what they do.”

“If you only speak when you’re sure of success, then you’re not really fighting, Ilar. It’s easy to be righteous when it’s safe to do so...”

Ilar breathed hard a couple of times. Unlike their previous disagreement, this one didn’t end with mana-based bullying. Ilar had learned. His gleam eyes still bore into Nestra’s own with barely contained rage. She returned it. She knew he was mostly pissed at himself.

“Perhaps it would be best if we took a short rest before continuing this discussion.”

Nestra had already said all she had to say. Not that it mattered since everyone was apparently ok with just killing off people as good faith tokens. The raiders returned to the tent soon after so she used the opportunity to retreat to the garden. The light of dawn showed the flowers were fading, the mana sustaining them long since depleted. Fat flies buzzed over the thick puddle of her congealed blood. It smelled pretty bad.

“Fuck this place.”

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The mood was tense and somber on the way back. The trap issue had spoilt the mood. Nevertheless, Ilar and a selection of Elders kept discussing things at high speed far in front of Nestra, a sign the deal was still on. At the speed they were hammering up details, she assumed the collaboration would be extensive. She was sweaty and tired by the time they reached the compound mid-afternoon. This time, the constant attention from the enclavers made her feel more vulnerable. Maybe it was physical exhaustion, or perhaps it was the incident. In any case, her hand kept reaching for the safety on her shotgun.

“You should take a moment to refresh yourselves,” Ilar told the rest of the Thresholders. “Our next meeting will start afterward. Cai, Clint, plot a course for tomorrow morning. I believe it would be best if you returned to the city afterward, for safety’s sake. Your mission here is complete.”

Ah, damn, that would make cooperating with Fox Mask very difficult. Nestra retreated to her room with the rest of the Thresholders, including the weaker gleams. To her surprise, there was someone in her room.

She closed the door behind her.

“You’re crazy,” she whispered. “There are gleams with us! They could feel your presence!”

Camille waved their hand. A transparent wall spread around the two of them.

“This should solve the sound problem. As for your users, besides the two leaders, they are terrible at mana perception,” Camille huffed behind their mask.

“Maybe, but our augs have some amazing senses and they have recordings as well.”

“I will be careful. Sadly, I came here because I carry unfortunate news. Ong... the Patriarch, he did not believe me.”

Nestra frowned.

“I thought you wanted us to gather proof first.”

“I know! I know. I wanted to tell him and bring proof later in case... in case I was found out. He didn't believe me. He was quite angry.”

“Well assassination attempts have a way of souring negotiations.”

“You don't get it! It's my grandpa! He... he was always there for me!” Camille screamed.

“Hey, hey, same side.”

“Sorry. Police girl... Crescent. Nestra. I don't understand. He must be suspicious, but I was brushed off so easily! He should know better! It's not because I... I...”

“Hey, are you ok? You sound... really affected.”

Silence. It was difficult to gauge Camille's reaction from behind their mask. There was a series of rapid-fire Vietnamese ending with a sentence, uttered in shaky English.

“I don't know why I'm telling this to you, a stranger.”

“Oi,” Nestra protested.

She removed her mask, assuming her true form. Two steps, and her index finger was shoved against Camille's sternum.

“We crossssed blades together. You are my rival. Do not dare disrespect me.”

“You... you are right. I was being rude. Sorry.”

“My mom used to say that the wounded beast lashes out. I think it was her way of saying that people who were feeling hurt were the most aggressive.”

“Your mother sounds like a wise woman,” Camille replied, suddenly very accommodating.

“Do you really mean that, or are you trying to be nice as an apology?”

“Yes.”

Nestra shrugged.

“Oh, well, it worked.”

She hesitated afterward. Camille was strangely vulnerable every time they opened up.

“Ok, let me be very direct. Do you have nobody else to open to? Because you’re both sharing and then getting all angry about it.”

“It’s not like that! I just don’t have anybody else right now! Before that, I had Nida!”

“What happened?”

“She... she died.”

“Oh, sorry. A raid?”

“No. Old age. Nida was... my dog.”

There was a heavy silence while Nesta hesitated on how to broach the subject. Diplomatically.

“Camille.”

“What!”

“You’re a fucking mess.”

“I know! Fuck you, I know. God...”

After a moment of hesitation, Nesta sat next to Camille who started sobbing softly through their mask. Nesta gently patted their shoulder. All of her dreams of a mighty rivalry were crumbling when faced with the fact Camille was even more isolated than Nesta had been. At least, Nesta had Aunt Claire, Stibs, Mazingwe who’d carried her through the Hard Times.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I’m here now though.”

“He always believed me,” Camille cried. “Before. Why not now? Isn’t it obvious that Manh is fighting against him? I’m so tired. So tired of it all. Why can’t they be nice for one fucking second?”

“Hey hey. We’ll get through this, alright? We’ll gather the evidence and they will see.”

“I shouldn’t need evidence to convince my family that... ah, it doesn’t matter.”

They deflated.

“I did so much for them, hoping for... and nothing. Nothing.”

Nesta waited for the moment to die down, then she very lightly punched Camille’s arm.

“If your family’s a bit of a letdown, there’s always found families. I’ll be there to back you up and occasionally stab you if you let me. You don’t have to go at it alone.”

“Are you not a police officer, and me a thief?”

“That’s the perfect secret friendship. Come on, I bet I could get you immunity.”

Camille laughed, though it was a bit brittle.

“As I said before, I’m not ready to give up on the village yet. You’re expected for dinner. You should probably go.”

“No, you go, I gotta take a bath.”

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An early dinner had been prepared for the return of the gleams, a more modest occasion than the previous ones. The round table had been reduced in numbers, and the decorations on the plain walls were only half as gaudy as before. The waiters brought dishes with subdued expressions, leaving as soon as they were able to. Only Elders were in attendance on the enclave’s side this time. The tale of Nestra’s near-death experience must have spread from the careful gazes and whispers that followed her everywhere. Before leaving, she’d told Fox Mask they had only one chance at getting the data before she had to leave. The operation would be tonight. She was getting a little bit nervous.

Since she was being ignored, Nestra joined up with Derek and Weiwei, discussing in low voices about the food since everything was being overheard. Watanabe approached her during the meal. He tapped on her wrist, then made a very peculiar gesture.

It was MaxSec visual code for ‘be ready’. Nestra blinked. No, it was Threshold military standard code, so it made sense for him to know it. Be ready? Be ready for what?

“Ahem, if I could get your attention?” Ilar said in Vietnamese.

A toast? Nestra watched as all eyes turned to him with various degrees of curiosity and annoyance. Ilar was breaking protocol by being the first to speak. Her visor did its best to translate his words even as he spoke them.

“As you may all know, we are close to reaching a functional agreement between our two cities. I would like to take a moment to thank all of you for your patience and efforts in this endeavor. Unfortunately, as you may all know, we’ve had a problem that endangers the agreement. I feel the need to clear the air.”

Watanabe approached Ilar before handing him a wide-screen datasheet, the kind that could be unrolled. Ilar picked it up with a smile.

“I am talking, of course, about the twenty-six million credits worth of magical artifacts that you have stolen via an intermediary we know as Fox Mask.”

The sheet displayed the person in question, a nice shot taken as Camille was grabbing some sort of measuring tool.

“And that you have either sold or is now still stored under our feet, specifically in Warehouse 3B.”

In the stunned silence that followed, pictures of what Nestra assumed was the warehouse in question appeared on the sheet in quick succession. She noted that the same measuring tool stolen on the first picture appeared on the shelves of the warehouse. She turned to Derek, who winked.

Pilot my ass, this guy was definitely Special Forces.

“I believe that before we come to an agreement, some... reparations are in order. After all, Threshold wouldn't want our budding friendship to... implode.”

The threat hung in the air for a few moments, then the shouting began.