



NOS
ASTRA
mights
RESOLUTION

**CAN A DANCER
MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

T.A. WHITE

BiOWARE

1



NOS ASTRA NIGHTS I: RESOLUTION by T.A. WHITE

www.nosastranights.com

contact@timalanwhite.com

© 2010 T.A. WHITE & BIOWARE/EA

Nos Astra, the glowing starport and capital city of the planet Illium, stretched back beyond the looming dusk. Located in the temperate polar region, it was perfectly practical to enjoy the open-air balconies of the highest skyscrapers completely naked, even at this time, which was precisely what Tirahin was doing.

Her days were spent dancing at Eternity, the local hotel and lounge bar near the Nos Astra Exchange. Many other asari were employed there, cogs in the machine that perpetually ensnared the city's wealthy clientele. The job paid well, and it kept her in great shape, but Tirahin rarely enjoyed it. What's more, her apartment was only two floors below the noisy bar, so she could never truly disconnect from the place that she'd grown to hate.

Unless she was in the pool. Built for her by Eternity's rich volus co-owner, Nuri Pin, to secure the continued service of his favourite dancer after Tirahin quit over a year ago, it occupied most of her apartment's modest balcony. Stripped of all attire, Tirahin submerged herself in the warm water. The tangible silence enveloped her. She bathed for hours; her worries drifted into the distant past.

She'd not always felt like this. There was a time when she was proud to entertain with her body – when she felt at one with her peers. But Liara had changed all that.

Dr. Liara T'Soni, daughter of the infamous asari, Matriarch Benezia, came to Illium following the death of her close friend, the human galactic hero, Commander Shepard. Tirahin danced for her, when Liara first ventured to Eternity. Immediately, she knew that

this client was different. Liara was alone for a start; she also sat upright and stiff, hands on her lap, as though being interviewed for a job. Tirahin assumed that she was dissatisfied with the performance, until Liara issued a sizeable tip. Afterwards, they drank together in the bar. Liara was nervous and awkward, but persisted.

As the months passed, their friendship grew, and Liara revealed more about herself – always after Tirahin had danced for her. She spoke of her fascination with the Protheans, and the mission against Saren Arterius. She disclosed the events surrounding Shepard’s untimely death, and her ensuing experience with the Shadow Broker, which led to the loss of another friend, and her surrendering of Shepard’s body to Cerberus, the pro-human terrorists. All of this had left her confused and direction-less. Liara was moving in unfamiliar circles, and she was lonely.

Tirahin listened, and soon Liara came to realise that she had to face the Shadow Broker after all.

One night at Liara’s, following an unpleasant evening’s work at Eternity – “all my clients are *bosh’tets!*”, which Liara greeted with a poor attempt at discreetly examining Tirahin's facial markings – Liara suggested that she quit dancing and become her personal assistant, to help her pursue the Shadow Broker. But change was hard. It was the reason why she’d wasted the last twenty years dancing.

Tirahin declined, and Liara found another assistant. As Liara's work took over, and Tirahin fell back into routine, they saw less and less of one another. But Liara had sown the seed, and tonight that seed had come to fruition. Commander Shepard was alive, and coming here, to Illium! Cerberus had done it, just as Liara had hoped!

Earlier that evening, a Blue Suns mercenary had strutted over to Tirahin's table, and proceeded to drop less-than-subtle hints as to his imminent fame. When Tirahin upped her game, he hung around, mixing drinks from the four corners of the galaxy – many of which were not congenial with human chemistry, let alone one another – and tipping her like crazy. He eventually boasted that he'd been hired to kill Shepard, and destroy a new Cerberus-built *Normandy*, which he claimed the commander was gallivanting around in, on Shepard's arrival at Nos Astra. Partially realising he'd said something that he shouldn't have, he keyed his omni-tool, deposited one last tip (he had presumably input an extra couple of zeros more onto the end of the sum than intended), and staggered out of the bar. When Brisaya, Nuri Pin's asari business partner, wasn't looking, Tirahin ran out after the mercenary. But he was nowhere in sight.

Tirahin emerged from the warm water, tingling under the droplets that rolled from her blue skin. She had found purpose.

*

The morning brought second thoughts. Gazing out of her apartment window, the dark sky persisted, the light from Tasale not reaching Nos Astra until midday. What if the mercenary was wrong? How could the famous Spectre be alive? Cerberus supposedly had limitless resources, but to bring someone back from the dead? *And* rebuild the *Normandy*?

A search of the extranet certainly revealed no clues. Even if Shepard was alive, surely one hapless mercenary wasn't a threat. And why come to Illium? To see Liara, perhaps? But Cerberus wouldn't invest colossal effort in bringing Shepard back, without an ulterior motive. If they had succeeded, and built the commander a new ship, then undoubtedly they had bigger plans for humanity's saviour than a visit to Nos Astra.

Tirahin needed answers, and that was enough to set her path. It could be dangerous, but she knew she was up to it. Despite being no huntress – her military training had lasted all of five years before she'd dropped out – she could fight. There'd be no more wasting of years, of decades. This was her opportunity.

Should she tell Liara? No. If she stopped the mercenary, it would lay the foundations for renewing their friendship. Tirahin knew they'd drifted apart because of Liara's work, but she also knew that Liara was disappointed in her, for not becoming her assistant. If she alone saved Shepard, well...Liara would be proud. She could join her, and together they'd right the wrongs of the galaxy, starting with the Shadow Broker!

Tirahin accessed her data terminal and called her landlord. She informed him that she was moving off-world, and transferred her remaining rent. Then she keyed for the extranet. She created a false bank account, withdrew all her credits, and paid them into the new account. The bank would trace this, of course, but procedure would buy her a day or two, by which time Tirahin Alatus would be in the Terminus Systems.

It didn't take long to pack. She took a last look at the framed holo of herself and Liara, which a kind male turian had taken in one of Nos Libertos's arcology skyscrapers, when they'd holidayed there. They were inside one of the non-climate-controlled booths, where tourists could sample Illium's (albeit toned down) equatorial temperatures. They were both dripping with sweat, and laughing.

Tirahin gently placed the holo back into her small storage crate. It now housed everything that she'd ever owned, save for the light armour on her back, and of course, her omni-tool. She stared at her belongings, an empty sadness growing inside. Even after the mission she wouldn't need any of this.

By the time the crate was collected by an old acquaintance from waste disposal, the sun was peeking from behind the adjacent skyscrapers. Tirahin glanced around her apartment for the last time, then stepped out into the corridor.

*

Nuri Pin reacted as expected, not believing for a moment that she was quitting, and taking his cue to offer her a larger apartment with outdoor *and* indoor pool. Tirahin wished that she could've seen his face behind the breathing mask, when she told him that Omega's Afterlife had offered her a three-storey condo with five pools, two jacuzzis, and a sauna. He was going to have a good time explaining that to Brisaya.

Sat in the departure lounge, Tirahin recited her plan. Thanks to her old friend, Elnora, who had contacts with the Eclipse mercenaries' Sisterhood, she'd discovered the location of a Blue Suns hideout. This wasn't a single mercenary, but an entire team. And awkwardly, they were right under the nose of her previous life, in a disused cab depot below the spaceport. According to Elnora, they'd been there about a week.

She'd need to become practically invisible to infiltrate them. Tirahin examined her left forearm, lamenting her omni-tool's lack of cloaking tech, and wondering if it – and she – was still up to the job. The omni-tool was ancient, but her father had known a thing or two about building them. She also taught the young asari a few tricks before she died.

Alright, first things first. She could help herself significantly, which was why she was leaving Illium in one hour, on a civilian freighter bound for Omega. Only she wouldn't be leaving Illium at all.

*

The *Haj'hen*, an unremarkable, batarian-owned, flying conjunction of cargo containers, groaned into motion. The main deck was crowded. Tirahin casually wandered amongst her fellow passengers, ensuring that she was seen. Later, if anyone asked them about her specific facial markings, they'd be able to confirm she was on board. There were also 32 other asari travelling – the reason she'd chosen this flight. They'd be her cover, on arrival at Omega.

Tirahin strolled down to the deserted lower deck, which she'd scouted upon boarding. She entered a large cargo hold, and made for the bay door. She activated her omni-tool, its bright, holographic shape extending from her forearm. Keying its interface, she raised it to the door's control panel. A moment later, security was bypassed, and the door ground fractionally open. Cold air blasted into the hold. Squinting through the stinging wind, Tirahin hacked the mainframe, ensuring that the crew still saw the door as sealed. It was important that none of them, no matter how lax they seemed, were given any hint of what she was about to do.

With the computer fooled, she programmed the door to close again in ten seconds, then deactivated her omni-tool. She closed her eyes, calming her mind. Blue ripples shimmered around her form. Her biotics flared, and a mass effect field encompassed her entire body. She leapt from the ship.