

The Amazing Colossal Garrus

"What's the name of the planet we're going to again, Commander?"

Commander Shepard turned away from his contemplation of the transcript of the mayday they had received to see Garrus joining him in the mess hall, the ceiling light glinting on his visor.

"Meron G194."

"Never heard of it," grunted Wrex, sat at the table as far as he could be from the other two.

Clearly irritated by the krogan's attitude, Shepard shifted his attention to him with narrowed eyes. "I wouldn't have expected you to. It would just be another desolate sandpit if these archaeologists we're looking for hadn't taken an interest in it."

Wrex snorted. "We've got better things to do than run around after a bunch of dweebs who've lost their trowel."

"A distress signal is a distress signal," Shepard said firmly, gazing steadily at Wrex, "If you don't like it, you know where the escape pods are."

The krogan's seat creaked as he shifted his weight to stand, then strode from the mess; whether or not he was sufficiently unimpressed to actually jettison himself in a pod remained to be seen.

Garrus' eyes had followed Wrex's progress, but the moment he was out of sight they returned to Shepard and he spoke as if there had been no interruption, "What do we know about this planet, Commander? Do you have any idea what harm was befalling these archaeologists?"

Shepard sighed and shook his head, weary of Wrex's antagonism. "All I know is that it's mostly desert wastes," he said, taking the krogan's place at the table, though at the opposite end to that which he had been sitting, "And I honestly didn't understand much of the distress call, but it came in on distress frequencies and whoever it was sounded pretty panicked."

"So we're going in blind?" Garrus asked, taking the seat across from Shepard.

"Basically," confirmed Shepard, "That means we go in careful. Think you can convince Wrex to try stealth for once?"

"I'll do my best."

Garrus eyed the human whose attention had returned to the transcript, still trying to glean something more than a vague threat from the information despite having pawed over it ever since setting course for Meron G194. Though still familiarising himself with the Commander, the turian knew enough about human body language to tell that Shepard was exhausting himself out by repeatedly beating his head against the unyielding wall the communiqué presented.

"You look tired, Commander. Do you need anything?"

Shepard looked up slowly, stared at Garrus blankly for a few seconds, then shook his head. "It's still a few hours before we reach Meron, so I think I'll rest in my quarters until then." He rose, rolled his head back and forth to iron out the crick in his neck before heading for the exit. "If I do need anything," he said, turning with his right foot on the bottom step, "I'll get it myself. Don't want you melting or whatever happens to you turians in the presence of a cookie."

“Thoughtful,” Garrus said with a smile.

In spite of his weariness with the entire universe it seemed, Shepard managed a small smile of his own before he departed.

Garrus sat alone in the now quiet mess hall for a time, allowing himself a few moments of relaxation. He didn’t fear what this new planet might have in store for him: he had entered the unknown plenty of times before, both with Shepard and without; in fact, the less he knew, the keener he was for a mission more often than not. It was simply a nice, even novel experience to have this large communal space to himself and his thoughts, and he intended to savour these moments before enduring Wrex’s inevitable reluctance to follow orders.

Unsurprisingly, Garrus found a full contingent of escape pods when he began his search for Wrex; he only checked them first because he wanted to stretch his legs and draw out the time before confronting the krogan anyway.

Wrex had hardly been original in his choice of hiding spot, it turned out: Garrus found him sulking in his quarters, gazing moodily out at the stars.

“Can I come in?” Garrus asked, pausing in the doorway.

“What do you want?” Wrex growled, not giving up his contemplation of the cosmos.

The turian stepped lightly into the room, though didn’t venture closer to Wrex than the inside of the entrance.

“Commander Shepard doesn’t want us barrelling in when we get to Meron, he doesn’t know what might be waiting for us,” Garrus said, trying not to make it sound that the krogan was being singled out by this message.

Wrex scoffed, Garrus was able to see him shaking his head in his reflection on the glass. “Be nice if we knew more than jack.”

“The message was indistinct, but- “

“Yeah, yeah. I get the picture,” Wrex said impatiently, finally turning to face Garrus, “Whatever, I’ll go easy. But if it turns out these idiots have just run out of teabags, I’m not going to be happy.”

“I realise that, Wrex,” Garrus responded calmly, “I imagine Commander Shepard would be pretty mad if this is a wasted mission.”

“So much for planet leave,” Wrex grumbled. He stomped past the turian and sat down on his bed with a thump. “Do you mind?” he asked, staring at Garrus expectantly.

Garrus departed, finding his way to his own cabin to wile away the hours before they made planetfall.

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“Garrus? You in there?”

The pounding of a large fist on the door to his quarters jerked the turian awake. “Y-Yes! What’s going on?”

"We're in orbit," Wrex growled through the metal panel separating them, "Get yourself ready, shuttle's leaving in ten minutes."

The krogan's heavy, clanking footfalls died away as Garrus looked around his cabin, trying to reorient himself; it seemed he had nodded off while watching a newscast from Palaven, slumping in his chair with his head propped up on his left hand.

Straightening his visor, he got to his feet, peering briefly out at the planet stretched out below him: it was an uninspiring expanse of reddish brown, interrupted only by a handful of muddy green oases which he would have thought were forests if it wasn't for the glint of the planet's distant red dwarf sun on their surfaces. Mentally writing Meron off as having potential for stunning vistas, he left for the shuttle dock.

After fetching his rifle from his equipment locker, he met the other two on board the shuttle, the door of which had been left open expectantly.

"All set?" Shepard asked as he glanced around from leaning over the console, no doubt double checking the landing coordinates or something of the sort.

"Yes, Commander," Garrus replied, sitting down opposite Wrex.

"I thought you said we were going in careful," Wrex said with an audible smirk, reaching out to flick the turian's gun, "What's all this about."

Garrus gazed steadily across the gap at the krogan. "Salty that you couldn't bring that cannon of yours?"

"A little," muttered Wrex as he flopped back in his seat.

The outer hatch shut with a hiss and Shepard took his seat, bringing the banter to a close. A conveyor carried the smaller vessel along the landing bay whose giant doors gradually parted, opening wide enough to allow the shuttle through just in time for clamps holding it to the conveyor to release and its engines to fire it out into near space.

Down through the planet's atmosphere they descended, the heatshield doing its job as the sky around them faded from black dotted with distant white specks to a similar green to that of the sparse pools Garrus had noticed, only shot with the reddish hues of the system's star. The ground was rushing up to meet them, but not one of the three crewmen had any misgivings that their landing would be safe and smooth: the shipboard computers had never yet failed to deliver.

"Helmets on, guys," Shepard advised, lifting his own onto his head, muffing the rest of his words a trifle, "Not even sure this place has a breathable atmosphere."

"There appears to be water, Commander," Garrus pointed out even as he obeyed the command.

"And there *is* an atmosphere," added Wrex, only having gone as far as to set his helmet in his lap.

"You know what would be worse than a pointless mission?" Shepard asked, his voice coming through loud and clear to the turian via the in-built microphone and speakers of their helmets, "Dying on a pointless mission. Worse than that, dying stupidly."

Wrex put his helmet on at last, though it seemed by no means a grudging action. "Just making a point."

The lone window aboard the shuttle was that point forwards from the small cockpit, and it wasn't until a couple of hundred metres from the surface that anything became visible to relieve the blank terracotta of the endless desert. Several small white buildings swam into focus as they approached, no doubt the prefabs set up by the archaeological team as their base of operations which was to also serve as Shepard's crew's landing site.

Dust billowed around the craft as its retros fired, bringing them down to the alien world with just the smallest of bumps. Moments later, Wrex and Garrus emerged from the reddish cloud, their weapons drawn and pointing cautiously about their surroundings; Shepard joined them in a similar posture soon after, having remained behind briefly to program the computer for the return flight in case they needed a speedy getaway.

"No sign of life," grunted Wrex to the other two, "Proceeding towards the camp."

As they approached the cluster of buildings and the dust of their arrival settled, they were able to make out more than just vague white shapes; the details did not paint a pretty picture.

"Something's definitely gone down here," Shepard said, stiffening in both voice and postured at the hostile signals the camp was giving them. There was barely a single structure that didn't carry signs of damage: from large gouges in the walls and ceilings, to crumpled and buckled supports; there was even what looked like a supply shed that had been crushed into a shape more suited to a breakfast plate.

"Search what's left of the buildings, call in if you find anything. Survivors would be ideal."

The three of them split up, each entering a separate partially destroyed structure. There was enough left recognisable of that which Garrus picked out as his first search location to tell him that it had once been a dormitory: just one of the double-decker bunkbeds remained undamaged and standing, the rest had toppled over, been bent out of shape, torn completely asunder, or all three. Though it was rather unnecessary thanks to the gaping, roughly triangular hole in the roof that also extended down one wall illuminating the room, Garrus switched on the flashlight built into his rifle, but its beam fell on nothing more than twisted and broken metal, shredded bedclothes, and hastily abandoned personal effects.

Confident that nothing was going to leap out of the few shadows the room held, he crouched down to examine a few of the items the archaeologists had left behind them. A collection of clothing, torn and scattered pages, and various personal effects presented themselves to him, most of them still largely intact. The papers were of most interest and proved to mostly be a disparate collection of notes left by several different archaeologists on Meron life and the artefacts they had so far uncovered. He spent a few minutes hunting around the room, searching beneath bunks for more scraps of paper, sure that they would be useful in shedding light upon what may have befallen those at the camp.

After tucking the notes into his suit, Garrus emerged from the building with his rifle once more held at the ready. He cast his eyes around the lifeless, abandoned base around which dust occasionally swirled in small eddies. The reddish disc of the planet's sun sat high in the sky which seemed a little browner than it had done from the upper atmosphere; no doubt the air was thick with the fine sand that covered much of Meron's surface.

Noticing Commander Shepard leaving the building opposite, Garrus descended from the sleeping quarters to join him.

"Anything?" Shepard asked once the turian was within a few metres of him.

"Bunkhouse," Garrus answered indifferently, "Seems to have been abandoned in a hurry. I found some of the archaeologists' notes which I'll take a look at once we're back on the Normandy."

Shepard nodded. "I think I was where they were examining and storing what they'd found, but no corpses or anything and nothing salvageable. Either they really legged it or whatever attacked them is a tidy eater."

"Nothing in here either," called Wrex suddenly, appearing on what was left of an elevated walkway on the outside of a third building, "but there's something worth checking farther out."

The krogan led the way through the back of the base and into the vast expanse of featureless desert beyond.

"The sand here has been disturbed," Garrus observed as he and Shepard followed Wrex, "These ridges don't look natural to me."

"Pretty sure you're right there," Wrex agreed. About fifty metres from the nearest building was the first true sign of life they had so far seen: a footprint. "*This* is definitely not natural."

The depression in the sand was several feet in length and was sunk nearly twelve inches into the forgiving terrain. The end nearest the base was flattened, broad curve which was slightly shallower than its opposite which featured several long, sharp points which were dug deeper into the sand.

"Whatever left this must be huge," muttered Shepard, crouching down to examine the imprint more closely.

"And it was fleeing the base," Garrus added.

"And it didn't stop here," said Wrex, pointing even further into the desert where further tracks extended into the distance until they were swallowed by the murky, dusty air.

Garrus walked around the edge of the first print, gazing down at it, trying to get an idea of what kind of creature had left it. Then he squinted to those that formed a trail into nothingness.

"Bipedal," he concluded, "Bipedal digitigrade, I would say. I feel that I have seen tracks like these before, but never anything this big."

"So, do we want to tangle with Big Foot?" Wrex asked, raising his rifle almost unconsciously.

Shepard stood up, staring past the krogan into the distance. "I say we get the Mako and follow the tracks. I want to know what we're dealing with here, and it can get us out of dodge better than we'd be able to on foot."

The other two murmured and nodded their ascent. "Okay. Garrus, wait in the base so we can keep our bearings on the prints. Keep in cover until we get back. Wrex, let's go."

As he watched the other two gradually being swallowed up by the dust as they returned to the shuttle, Garrus skulked inside a hangar beneath the building Wrex had searched; the door had been buckled and bent far enough out of shape to allow him to squeeze inside. As there were no

windows and its walls and ceiling remained largely undamaged it was almost completely black inside, yet Garrus' flashlight was able to illuminate enough to tell him that it was both a safe place to lurk and that it had probably once housed the archaeological team's own rovers; no doubt they had been used to evacuate when the giant had attacked.

He sat down on the smooth unyielding floor against the back wall, his rifle trained on the narrow gap between the ruined door and the wall which had served as his entrance. Nothing stirred, however, except for sand whispering across the ground outside as it was carried on the wind. Meron had seemed inhospitable when they had arrived, but everything they had since discovered made it downright eerie.

Garrus was pleased to hear the distant sound of the approaching Mako. He was nevertheless cautious as he emerged from his hiding spot, only signalling with his flashlight when he was able to make out one human and one krogan inside it.

The trail of footprints proved easy to follow once they had found the first one again, though they led the trio deep into the desert, far beyond the point at which the camp faded from sight. More than an hour passed and still the tracks continued, the only things that gave any hint that the Mako was moving at all; its surroundings held no other points of reference.

"There's something up ahead," Wrex said at long last, pointing along the path they followed to the very edge of their vision where, indeed, a shape was looming. Within five minutes they had pulled up alongside it, Garrus hopping out to examine what seemed to be the giant, sprawled at the end of the trail.

"It's a salarian," he announced as he walked around the immense, lifeless, and naked body.

"A salarian?" he heard Shepard ask, clearly shocked and disbelieving.

"There's no question, Commander," Garrus replied as he reached its head, characteristically long, thin, and horned with vast glassy eyes and its mouth agape, "I knew I recognised the tracks."

The other two climbed out to join him, all pacing around the extraordinary site.

"Definitely the same size and shape of feet," Shepard confirmed, nudging the salarian's leg with his toe just to make sure it was dead, "But how in the hell did he get this big?"

Wrex shrugged, considering the corpse's face with his arms crossed over his chest. "Died from exposure by the look of things, so I'm gonna rule out this sandpit being this guy's home. Probably wouldn't have made it quite this far if he was asphyxiating, though, so the air's probably breathable."

Garrus was paying little attention to his companions' words: he had spotted something lying in the sand next to one of the salarian's hands. Picking it up, he examined the object which was more or less cylindrical, both of its ends closed and decorated by swirling, serpentine engravings.

"What's that?" Wrex asked, striding closer.

"I think the salarian was holding it before he died," Garrus replied, turning the artefact slowly in his hands, "I'll see if it's mentioned in the notes I found when we're back on board."

As the discovery of the dead giant meant the end of avenues of investigation on the planet, the three of them returned to the Mako and then to the shuttle. As before, Wrex and Garrus sat alert and ready to respond to any threats that may have presented themselves, unlikely though they seemed on this barren world, while Shepard piloted the vehicle, following their own tracks as well as the salarian's to lead them back to the base. However, upon Garrus' lap now sat the curious artefact whose mysteries the turian was keen to explore.

Nothing new presented itself from the dusty edges of their vision on the return journey, so they were able to load the rover and themselves back onto the shuttle without incident. Shepard called the flight program into action and they were soon powering their way back towards the Normandy, the sky around them filtering out the brown of the dust, then the atmosphere's natural green and the host star's fiery glare, finally returning to the inky blackness with which any spacefarer was most familiar.

"Do we have any more assignments, Commander?" Garrus asked, stowing his helmet before exiting the shuttle; Wrex had already lumbered away.

Shepard shook his head, having paused by the docking hatch when the question had been posed. "It's back to the colony now. Why? Were you hoping for some more excitement?"

"I would like to dedicate some time to examining this," he held up the artefact he was still carrying, "and those notes I found, but I wouldn't want that to get in the way of other duties."

"I don't see a problem with that. I'm not expecting trouble on the way home," Shepard said, walking side-by-side with the turian back into the ship proper, "Heh, might even make Wrex feel a little better about this mission if we get something tangible out of it."

Garrus retired to his quarters thereafter but, feeling that it would be better to start his investigations of the notes and artefact with his mind fresh, chose to defer such things. He spent the remainder of the day resting – though the concept of a circadian rhythm aboard a craft in deep space was more than a little loose.

When he rose some arbitrary time units later, his brain refreshed and set to become more so from the turian form of nourishment, he couldn't help but feel that something was a little off with himself. Though he put it down to being still a little weary physically, he noticed that he was a touch clumsy as far as his arms were concerned: several times between rising and settling to his research he found his elbows colliding with walls and doors, or else overestimating the distance he needed to reach for objects. He thought little of these incidents, however, since he'd experienced such periods of poor coordination through fatigue in the past.

Ready to begin work after a leisurely start, he gathered all the notes he'd found along with the artefact and placed them on the table in his cabin, sitting down in the chair that faced the view of the stars that, despite being lightyears distant, burned brightly enough to be visible to him; he liked, when deep in contemplation, to be able to marshal his thoughts by gazing into the endless black void that was simultaneously so familiar, yet also so exotic and unknown.

His main interest was, of course, the lone object the archaeological survey had uncovered which had survived what Garrus and his colleagues were certain was an attack by that gargantuan salarian, yet he was keen to read every torn and crumpled page he had collected with great care, wanting to squeeze every scrap of information from the words of these learned and inquisitive beings. He began by arranging the papers by their subject matter, then collated them further by author where possible to create the most coherent picture he could of the various studies.

The first bundle of notes Garrus passed his eyes over were by the team's geologist, enthusing about the chemical makeup of the sand, comparing its similarity to that which had been found on some other barren backwater and exclaiming about what this meant for science's knowledge of desert worlds and the classification of Meron's host star. Unlike the undoubtedly esteemed Professor Marvikus, Garrus couldn't bring himself to get worked up about such seemingly trivial matters. Preferring to save his energies for more engaging topics, Garrus merely skimmed the last two sides of the professor's notes, paying sufficient attention to notice a lack of any mention of any signs of life on the planet's surface.

"How's the little researcher doing?"

Garrus looked up. Wrex was standing in the doorway, his posture suggesting that had paused on his way elsewhere and wasn't planning to linger too long.

"Fine," Garrus answered, placing Marvikus' notes aside and picking up the next stack that came to hand, "Apparently Meron's sand is fascinating, but I don't see it myself."

"That's the problem with scientists," the krogan said with obvious disdain, "everything's always gotta be 'fascinating'. The only fascinating thing about that dustbowl's sand is how good it was at being boring. Sand is sand."

Wrex shifted his weight as though to resume his progress towards whatever destination he had in mind but he paused again, this time to give the turian an appraising glance, as if he thought something was amiss with him. Before Garrus could question him, however, he had lumbered down the hallway and out of sight.

Had he not been preoccupied with being 'the little researcher', Garrus might have thought more of the odd way Wrex had been looking at him; instead he merely pushed the curious moment aside to focus on the task he had set himself.

Fortunately for the turian's powers of concentration, the remaining notes were all centred around the objects the team had uncovered and were far more stimulating than the contemplation of sand.

Garrus surmised that each of the items about which he read had been left destroyed beyond the hope of repair inside the warehouse Commander Shepard had investigated; most of the archaeologists, however, had taken the trouble to provide a sketch of what they had been describing and about which they had been hypothesising. Though he was no expert on ancient pottery and the like, he absolutely agreed with the consensus to which the archaeologists seemed to have come: that all the objects they had found had originated from the same civilisation; each sketch bore traits shared with those over which Garrus had already passed his visored gaze, and those which followed.

Something which several sets of notes mentioned in some detail surprised Garrus: although it was almost beyond doubt that every artefact the team had retrieved had a single shared origin, that origin was *not* Meron G194. Every single thing of note the mission had found had been located within a hundred kilometres of their basecamp, and their preliminary scans from orbit had identified this small section of the planet's surface as the only area with any vestige of variance from the otherwise unremarkable desolate wastes. Indeed, these archaeological finds were the only hints that there had ever been life on Meron before their own arrival; either the long dead civilisation had somehow wiped any other trace of their existence from both the sandy surface and the rock below – no tunnels, caverns, or caves had been detected less than five hundred metres underground – or these objects had been left behind on a lifeless world by an alien race.

Even more intrigued than he had been when he had first sat down with his research materials, Garrus finally located the notes for which he'd been searching: item MG-194/C227, instantly identifiable from the habitual sketch in the top right corner of the first page. This archaeologist, one Professor Valeon, made many of the same remarks as their colleagues had done about their own objects of interest: that variants of its serpentine engravings were present on other artefacts which thus hinted at a common origin. In fact, there was just one observation that Professor Valeon made which made these notes worth reading: that items with similar descriptions had been discovered on other seemingly uninhabited worlds lightyears away, something which Valeon felt strongly supported the theory that, for whatever reason, an alien civilisation capable of rapid interstellar travel had voyaged to various unoccupied planets to leave their mark.

Garrus was just about to bundle the notes up, ready to pass on to a museum or some other interested party, when he noticed something else that set Professor Valeon's writings apart from the others. Everything Garrus had read had been handwritten – no doubt to mitigate any unreliability in electronic methods of notetaking on an alien world – and, though the quality of each archaeologist's script was different, each had been consistent throughout the respective sets of notes. Valeon's writing, however, had deteriorated quite dramatically towards the end of his observations: the neat cursive letters had become larger and rougher, yet also somehow more cramped. As he reread these last few paragraphs, Garrus also realised that Valeon seemed to have stopped writing midsentence – the last mark on the page was a comma, not a period.

"Must have been writing when they were attacked," Garrus muttered to himself.

Unable to glean any more after another ten minutes of squinting at the crumpled papers, he gathered them together and set them aside.

He sought out Commander Shepard to relay his findings shortly after; though his human superior listened as intently as could be hoped to everything Garrus had to say, it was clear that he did not find the mysteries the archaeologists' findings held quite as intriguing as the turian did. Wrex was far less subtle in displaying his indifference: he departed the conversation mere moments after it began.

"I think you should take everything you found along to the museum when we get back Eden Prime," Shepard advised; Garrus took this to also be a means of shifting the responsibility of appearing interested from himself.

"I intend to, Commander," Garrus said, betraying no hint of disappointment in the lukewarm reception his report had received, "I'm sure they will be most interested in what was discovered."

Shepard's interest in the conversation seemed to have disappeared, replaced by a preoccupation of his own: he was staring at Garrus, his brow furrowed in what the turian knew to be an expression of puzzlement.

"Are you okay, Commander?"

Shepard nodded slowly, though his expression didn't change. "Are *you* okay?"

"Yes. Yes, I feel fine. Why?"

"I don't know," Shepard said, his words coming out just as measured as his head gesture had been, "You just look a little...off to me."

Garrus glanced down at himself very briefly, then looked back at Shepard. "I assure you, Commander, I feel perfectly all right."

Garrus awoke after another period of slumber in his bunk feeling sufficiently rested for a 'day' of no plans other than what life aboard a frigate demanded. No alarms were blaring, no one was outside his door requesting his presence or assistance, so he felt comfortable in lingering in a state of repose until he was compelled to rise.

He glanced towards the table; sure enough, there the cylindrical artefact remained, standing where he had left it hours before. The turian still found himself immensely curious about the object, so had passed some time before finally retiring to bed examining it minutely, held up close to his face, peering through his visor with the other eye closed to bring its details into maximum focus. Though he had completed a thorough visual inspection of every last millimetre of its surface, no answers to the mysteries it held emerged from its dark grey, smooth yet dull exterior.

A glint of a colour other than the stark white of the cabin's lighting off the object's surface brought his attention to his window, out of which he could see more than blackness dotted with sparkling diamonds for once. The ship was passing by a star, though still many millions of kilometres distant, its golden glow illuminating one small, rocky exoplanet. He wondered idly what system this was as it gradually slid out of view, though this was not a question for which the answer warranted the amount of effort required to retrieve it.

When the very last of the tiny, no doubt unsurvivably hot planet had disappeared from his view, Garrus decided it was time to vacate his bed. He sat up and swung his legs over the edge of his bunk, then stood up, stretching his arms high when he was upright.

Things went wrong with just his second step of the day: his clawed toes caught on something as he pulled his foot forward, sending him stumbling into one of his chairs with which he braced himself. Looking back, he raked the floor for what had tripped him up, yet he saw nothing other than its perfectly flat, smooth surface; nothing seemed to have been kicked across the room by the incident either. Perplexed, he started towards the door again, only for the very same thing to happen again.

Leaning against the wall he had so ungainly reached, he squinted around the room, wondering if the offender was transparent and hoping to locate it from a tell-tale reflection; still he saw nothing. He was mystified. Had someone perhaps sneaked into his room while he was asleep and set up some kind of invisible forcefield at floor level? If he hadn't known that it was only himself, Commander Shepard, and Wrex aboard the Normandy that would have been a feasible explanation: neither of his crewmates seemed the type for that kind of practical joke, even if the krogan could be a little on the grouchy side.

Tripping again on his third attempt to reach the door took the situation beyond coincidences. Drawing out a chair, Garrus sat down and, much though he doubted they would be the cause of his lack of coordination, looked down at his feet.

No way...

He blinked, holding his eyes shut for a moment to somehow 'reset' them, for they were surely malfunctioning in some way. When he opened them again, however, and they relayed the

same information to his brain as they had done before their reboot, Garrus was forced to the conclusion that what he was seeing was real.

His feet, incredible though it seemed, were undeniably larger than he remembered them being; they weren't a part of his body to which he had ever paid particularly close attention, but he knew them well enough to be able to discern a change in scale.

He lifted one from the floor and rested it upon its opposite knee for closer scrutiny. The soles seemed no different: the flesh was pliable as ever with a few small creases lining the instep. He flexed one toe, then the other, then both simultaneously: they functioned normally, curling towards the ball of his foot, the more bulbous end segments forcing the flesh of those below them to squash and bulge out. His claws were as long, sharp, and pointed as he remembered them being, completing the picture of normality.

And yet, as he aligned a hand against the test subject – wrist to heel – there was no question anymore that something was amiss. His feet had always been larger than his hands, but now the difference was quite remarkable: the tips of his fingers no longer reached the ball of his foot, a feat of which they had been comfortably capable previously.

Bewildered but willing to put the change down to a very late, extremely rapid growth spurt confined to that one portion of his body, Garrus spent the next fifteen minutes or so pacing his cabin, acquainting himself with his new proportions and learning how to walk comfortably with them. Only once he had managed to jog three laps of the small room without tripping did he feel ready to venture out to the rest of the ship.

He encountered Wrex as he exited the crew cabin compound, the krogan appearing to have been about to enter it himself.

"Glad you decided to join the land of the living," Wrex said with a small hint of impatience, "Shepard's got a job for you. It's not all rest and relaxation around here."

Garrus merely nodded, not wanting to explain the long period in his quarters to anyone unless it became necessary. "Better late than never. Isn't that what humans say?"

Wrex shrugged; it was hard to tell if this was a sign of ignorance or indifference.

'Probably both,' Garrus thought to himself as he followed the krogan to where Commander Shepard was waiting aboard the command deck.

"One sleepyhead reporting for duty," Wrex announced before he trudged off to attend to his own business.

"Morning, Garrus," Shepard said, raising his eyes from the display which had his attention.

"Good morning, Commander. You have work for me, I believe."

Shepard nodded and gestured towards a console on the other side of the room. "I just want you to do a manual check of the navigation system. Verify the computer's stargate, its logs and stuff. Routine stuff."

"Yes, Commander," Garrus affirmed. He paused for just a second, reading the human's expression for any sign that he had noticed anything odd about his appearance, any glances towards his feet.

“Garrus?”

“Yes! Sorry, Commander.” The turian took a seat where Shepard had indicated, reassured that his secret was still intact. He wasn’t quite sure why he wanted to keep his bigger feet hidden from his crewmates, but he did know that it was something of which he’d prefer to maintain sole knowledge.

Barely had Garrus sat down and started search the nearby storage compartments for an old-fashioned physical copy of their starchart with which to cross-reference that with which the computer was navigating when he heard Shepard get up and leave, leaving him alone to carry out his work.

After flicking through the pages to find Meron, Garrus turned to the display before him and tracked back along their flight path to where the computer thought their point of departure to be; the composition of the two systems matched up, confirming the computer’s accuracy. That could have been job done, but Garrus believed in doing his work properly, so set about confirming that each system they had passed was noted correctly in the computer.

Every minute or so, however, he found his attention wandering, wandering down to the floor and the two objects through which he could feel the floor, often dragging his gaze down with it. Such extreme growth in one part of the body in such a short space of time did not seem natural to him: he’d never heard of it happening to any turian he had ever read about or known.

Zalea. Check.

True, he hadn’t exactly been keeping tabs on the size of his feet before now, so it was perfectly possible that they could have been getting bigger for some time now.

Buleron. Check.

But how likely was it that they would suddenly have become such an obstacle? Surely he would have started to lose his coordination much sooner had their growth been gradual.

Retis C-350. Check.

And just as surely he would have adapted to their increasing size, leaving him just as coordinated as if they hadn’t been growing at all. It seemed that overnight growth was the only explanation that would make sense.

Ladus 3BPW, a star with one small, rocky exoplanet in close orbit. Check.

That then begged the question of how his feet had grown so much so quickly. And why just his feet? It was quite true, of course, that body parts often grew independently of each other during adolescence, but never so rapidly.

Destination: Eden Prime. Check.

Then Garrus recalled the trouble he’d had the previous day, the feeling of poor coordination in his arms; was that connected? He looked down at his hands, but they didn’t appear any different to how he remembered them. It was all very strange indeed...

Garrus combed the ship for Commander Shepard to report success and to seek any further tasks; it was a nice chance to stretch his legs after being sat at a computer terminal for some time anyway.

"Navigation systems are confirmed accurate, Commander," he announced, locating Shepard at the drive core.

"Ah, good," Shepard answered, only glancing up briefly from monitoring the core's readings.

Garrus waited a moment for any further orders before prompting the Commander: "Anything else you would like me to do?"

"Nothing urgent," the human said slowly, his attention clearly more on spotting any anomalies in the core than on the conversation, "Perhaps a high-level systems check at some point."

"Yes, Commander." Garrus took his leave, not wanting to distract Shepard's preoccupied mind any further.

The remainder of that day passed in a relatively solitary fashion for each of the crew. Garrus found his own entertainment for the most part, though he did pass a short time with the other two in the mess hall for some communal sustenance. The systems scan Shepard had asked him to carry out threw up only one minor warning: one of the heat sinks' lithium levels were depleting, thus reducing the ship's stealth capability. Shepard shrugged this off when Garrus informed him, clearly sure of the colony's ability to replenish the necessary element.

By the time Garrus returned to his cabin, his mouth stretched wide in a yawn, he had all but forgotten about his feet; they only returned to the front of his groggy mind when he had climbed onto his bunk and settled down for the night. He considered them idly, propped up at the other end of his bed, looking wholly unremarkable for a turian. He wiggled each of his four toes, their claws avoiding the wall by several inches, then chuckled softly to himself: after all, did it really matter that he had slightly bigger feet than had done yesterday? He yawned again, then closed his eyes and allowed sleep to claim him.

Garrus woke the following morning to an unfamiliar sound: rather like something was scratching across a surface. The more his brain rose from the depths of drowsiness, the more he was able to pin down what the noise was: whatever the something was it was hard and narrow, and it wasn't so much scratching the surface as dragging lightly across it, probably not a deliberate action; that ruled out it being someone outside his door.

His eyes remained closed, wanting to try to figure out what and where the noise was purely through the power of his hearing; a game to get his mind going for whatever the day held for him.

He listened, now able to guess that the sound was located somewhere that followed the line of his body as he lay there upon his bunk. Something rubbing on the outside of the ship, perhaps? No, that didn't seem right: the surface being brushed against was probably metal, yes, but it seemed like a brushed metal, a softened metal, not quite so hardy a metal, a metal designed to be decorative perhaps, a metal used *within* the ship.

Unable to fathom a better guess than what he had concluded, Garrus opened his eyes and directed them towards the location he had surmised for the sound. What he saw were his feet, yesterday's objects of fascination. They seemed no bigger than they had done before he had fallen

asleep, merely rocking from side to side in an idle sort of way, their claws dragging gently over the relatively soft metal plate that lined the cubby in which his bunk was tucked.

Garrus was all set to let his thoughts drift elsewhere, perhaps even to doze off again for a while, but then the meaning of the sound and what was making it hit him. His eyes jerked open again, allowing him to stare down at the appendages which had caused him such disquiet the previous day. Yet, no matter how hard he stared at them, there was no way of making them appear bigger than they had done yesterday morning; if anything they looked more in proportion to his legs, no doubt due to his having become more used to their new size. He had obviously just slid down the bed in the night, nothing to worry about.

Yes, definitely something to worry about!

A mere turn of the head was enough to demonstrate to him that both he and his pillow were in their usual location a few inches from the 'headboard' of his bed, which could only mean that there was now more turian separating his head from his feet.

Even before he had raised himself from sitting to standing, Garrus knew that something else had changed about his body: like his feet, he had never paid much attention to his knees when he was seated, yet he instinctively knew that they made a sharper angle as he sat on the edge of his bed, his feet resting on the floor; his legs were definitely longer.

He stood up and hurried towards the closet where his garments and personal effects were stored, stumbling several times on the short journey as he struggled to come to terms with his longer lower limbs. With the touch of a button the molecular structure of the door's outer panel changed, shifting its reflectivity to that of a mirror and shedding some stark white artificial light on his situation.

Garrus had never been one for self-admiration and thus had seldom made use of the mirror function, but even he with a relative lack of acquaintance with his reflection could tell at a glance that he was taller than he used to be. However, it was by no means as simple as that: his torso, neck, and head looked to be as they had been since he had reached adulthood, but made to look almost comically small by his legs which almost looked like they had been stretched overnight.

He moved to the door, his strides exaggerated in his attempts to walk without falling. Reaching the top of the frame was much easier than he remembered it being, a simple fact which confirmed beyond any doubt that his legs had indeed grown over the course of his slumber; at least he could still enjoy several inches of headroom.

This newest change would not go unnoticed, and Garrus was starting to feel distinctly uneasy that his body was undergoing such rapid and sporadic alterations; perhaps it was time to report to Commander Shepard.

"I guess this *is* a little unusual." That was Commander Shepard's reaction to the lanky turian presenting himself on the command deck and explaining the changes he had observed happening to his body.

"He looks like he's wearing stilts," Wrex commented from his station a few seats down.

"I'm sure it's nothing to worry about. Probably a reaction to something back on Meron," Shepard assured Garrus, tilting his head back slightly to meet the latter's higher gaze.

Garrus looked back down at him, neither convinced nor reassured by his condition being waved away in such a manner. “I *am* worried about it, Commander. Turians don’t grow after adolescence. Once we’ve finished, that’s it.”

Shepard shook his head. “I imagine there was just something about Meron that doesn’t agree with turian biology. Probably in the sand, and those notes you brought back must have retained some. We’ll get you treatment once we’re back at the colony.”

“But Commander- “

“If it gets in the way of your duties, you’re excused. We’re only a few days out from Eden Prime now, it’ll be fine.”

Garrus stumbled and tripped his way back to his cabin after that most unsatisfying meeting with Shepard, able to hear Wrex’s poorly disguised sniggers escaping the command deck; though he knew perfectly well that he presented something of a comic figure at the moment, he would have appreciated a little more sympathy from his compatriots.

The moment he had regained his privacy he collapsed into the nearest chair, breathing a little more heavily than the walk to the cabin complex usually warranted.

Still on the table next to him were the notes and the artefact. Little though he wanted to touch them in case Shepard was right about the cause of the changes he was undergoing, Garrus picked up the nearest piece of paper and examined it: sure enough, there was a distinct sandy texture to it, the whiteness tinged with red from the tiny particles of Meron’s surface which had lodged themselves between the fibres. The artefact too had retained sand, largely in the narrower parts of the serpentine engravings.

Hurriedly ridding his hands of his souvenirs lest he contaminate himself further, he leaned back in his chair and considered what would be the best course of action. He naturally wished to limit further growth in his extremities but disposing of his finds was out of the question: he was quite certain that they would be valuable in the right hands. He would therefore have to separate himself from those objects as much as possible, and the best way to do that was to seal them in something airtight.

Gloved hands transferred the artefact and each stack of notes into a box he had come across in the kitchen, intended for food but just as suitable for the task at hand. A hiss issued from the clear plastic cuboid as Garrus engaged the vacuum creation, sealing both he and the objects from harm.

Despite having gone through much the same process the previous day, Garrus spent the following hour or so attempting to relearn how to walk with his longer legs. After landing sprawled on the floor of his cabin for a second time, he realised that, should Meron’s effects on his body continue, ambulation lessons may become a daily ritual.

When he felt that he’d got the technique nailed, Garrus took a breath and gazed absentmindedly about his room. Only then was he hit with a further realisation: everything he and the contaminated objects had touched within these walls were likely to be equally dirtied!

Another couple of hours later, every square millimetre of both his cabin and himself had been cleaned with the utmost diligence; he had never seen the place so spotless. In an ideal universe he would have extended his campaign of sanitisation to the rest of the ship, but that was simply unfeasible on the Normandy’s scale; the epicentre had been dealt with and that would have to suffice.

Wrex had stopped by part way through Garrus' purge, keen to enquire as to why the turian was on all fours, scrubbing the floor vigorously, and why the hallway outside his cabin was semi-blocked by a myriad of items smelling strongly of disinfectant. He had departed chuckling, but Garrus took the krogan's visit to be more an expression of concern for his wellbeing than merely an acquisition of a cheap laugh.

Garrus retired to his clinically-odoured bunk having achieved little beyond the sterilisation of his immediate surroundings, though he suspected that might have been down to Wrex's visit: it crossed his mind more than once that the krogan may have carried a message of his preoccupation back to Commander Shepard.

Though it did little to console him, Garrus at least fell asleep that night forewarned that he would more than likely wake up in a few hours' time to some fresh physical change to which he would have to acquaint himself: whatever was causing it was already in his system, and it seemed certain that his further handling of his Meronian finds would only add to the 'infection'. Hopefully, though, now that the probable cause was contained, further effects would be milder; it was this more comforting thought that eased him to rest.

Sleepiness cleared from Garrus' mind just a few seconds after he awoke; the moment it had done so, he began scanning his body for signs of change, for any longer or broader extremities. Though his eyes observed nothing that seemed unusual, he could not deny feeling a little...off. He settled back down on his pillow and tried to identify what was amiss, the sensation of drowsiness, of physical heaviness, taking its sweet time to lift despite his alertness; though he lay there for the best part of ten minutes he couldn't identify the source.

"Augh!"

In the midst of inspecting a faulty servo on the door to his quarters, Commander Shepard heard the cry of pain from down the hallway. Downing his tools, he hurried in the direction from which it had come, finding himself at Garrus' cabin.

It was clear from the first glimpse of the turian that he had grown in the night once again. His legs still looked just as unnaturally long as they had done the previous day, indicating that his torso had undergone no changes, yet the forehead Garrus was now rubbing was more spacious than Shepard remembered.

"Umm...Garrus?"

The turian's eyes jerked open, unaware that he was no longer alone. "Yes, Commander?"

"You've grown again."

Garrus let out a low noise that combined his frustration, fear, and bewilderment. "I know, but I can't tell in what way."

"I can."

It was only as he looked down at Shepard and felt the muscles in his neck struggling to stop his chin drooping all the way to his chest that it clicked. He hurried to his closet, engaged the door's mirror mode, then stared at his reflection: he now had to stoop slightly to get his whole head in view, and what a head it was.

“Humans have a word for what you look like,” Shepard said as gently as he could as he moved to stand beside the turian, though there was no escaping the fact that he was poking fun at Garrus, “Bobblehead.”

“Apt,” Garrus replied, dismayed by what he was seeing. The combination of his stilt-like legs and his now vastly oversized skull put him in the neighbourhood of a foot taller than the human next to him and, judging by how a spot a couple of inches above his eyes had become overly acquainted with the top of the tall-by-design doorframe, over seven feet tall in total.

Shepard reached up and placed a consoling hand on Garrus’ shoulder. “It’s weird, but it’ll be okay once we get back to Eden Prime. Consider yourself on medical leave until you’ve recovered.”

Though he would have liked to have heard a little more urgency from him, the fact that Shepard was no longer dismissing his concerns relieved some of the tension Garrus was feeling; the human’s tone helped with that.

Garrus turned, feeling his head wobbling unstably upon what was now a neck inadequately scaled to reliably support its weight. It felt very odd, having become accustomed to looking at him more or less eye-to-eye, to be peering so far down at the human he was already starting to hold in some esteem.

Despite his considerable disquiet, the turian managed a small, gracious smile. “Thank you, Commander.”

Although he had been relieved of his responsibilities aboard the ship, Garrus still felt compelled to assist the other two in some form to avoid becoming an ever-larger dead weight. Commander Shepard, perhaps due to how the turian’s head lolled from side to side on its comparatively spindly neck, did not appear keen on having Garrus perform any tasks which were either physical or critical to the running of the Normandy. As a result, Garrus found himself spending considerable time on the command deck, performing detailed maintenance of all the ship’s computer systems; it could hardly be called inspiring work, yet it beat idling around his cabin, feeling guilty for not doing anything productive.

The days that separated the Normandy from its destination all began with Garrus waking up in what was increasingly becoming a very cramped bunk to discover that some new part of his body had swelled in the night.

He awoke on the second day of sick leave to find his head and feet both hard up against each end of his bunk, his knees even bent slightly to fit his frame into the space. The mirror in his closet door showed him what was, bizarrely, a slightly reassuring picture: a more or less proportional turian body thanks to his torso having grown, save for his still inadequate neck and, as Wrex had pointed out on a visit to the command deck, undersized hands.

Despite having taught himself to stoop when moving from room to room the previous day, his bent back failed to account for his newly-acquired height and so, for the second morning in a row, smacked his forehead on the top of his cabin’s doorframe; his neck lost what control it had over his skull on impact, sending his head rolling wildly around on his shoulders for a few seconds. Although he immediately readjusted his posture for passing through doorways, his walk to the command deck to resume his tedious work, the only work Command Shepard thought him capable at the moment, was an irritable one.

Speaking of Commander Shepard, though not a short man by any means, he was now barely taller than Garrus' shoulders.

"If I didn't know you, you'd almost be intimidating," the human commented as they passed one another later in the day, watching as Garrus straightened up after navigating a doorway.

The turian chuckled lightly, feeling his neck muscles straining as he looked down at his commanding officer. "I suppose you'll just have to get used to it, Commander. Unless it can be treated."

"It will be, I'm sure," Shepard replied, perhaps to reassure himself as well as Garrus.

By the time the Normandy was beginning its approach to Eden Prime Garrus had returned to looking like a more or less normal turian, albeit a good foot taller than he had been at the start of this mission. He was actually feeling quite thankful that his sporadic growth had continued in some respects: at least he had a neck to suit his head now, though he hadn't quite yet shed the nickname of 'Bobblehead' Wrex had enthusiastically adopted for him.

The final approach to the colony meant that each member of the Normandy's very skeletal crew was in their respective cabins packing what they didn't want to leave aboard the ship, or else scouring the decks for misplaced items. Garrus had the essentials stuffed into a bag and was retrieving the vacuum-sealed box that was destined for the settlement's museum.

"Need any help, Bobblehead?"

Garrus straightened up, the box clutched in his hands, to see Wrex on the threshold.

"No, thanks. I actually feel totally fine now," he said, placing the box on the table so he could sling his bag over one shoulder, "And I would appreciate it if you could stop calling me that, especially since it's no longer applicable." The admonishment came out a tad snippier than he had intended; he lowered his gaze apologetically.

"If you say so," Wrex shrugged, stepping back to let the turian duck through the doorway in a far more graceful manner than he had done on previous days.

Looking down at the krogan, Garrus got the impression that Wrex was even less happy to be looking up at him than Commander Shepard was. "You don't like me being taller than you, do you?"

"Feels weird," Wrex muttered, "and you look ridiculous in that."

Garrus looked down at himself: his suit now far from fitted him, leaving several inches of lower leg and forearm visible, not to mention being tight around the chest and waist. "An officer has a duty to dress appropriately, even when it's not entirely expedient," he answered with joking pomposity, unabashed by the jibe.

Wrex shrugged again, then returned to his own cabin.

"Orbit established," Wrex announced.

"Check landing clearance," Shepard ordered, his finger hovering over the console in front of him.

Garrus took great care in jabbing the button that would send that request to Constant Control: he'd had a few mishaps with his newly enlarged fingers. "Clearance granted."

Down went Shepard's own finger. "Commencing descent."

The human's eyes were glued to a screen that displayed the ship's alignment with its prescribed landing bay, ready to bark adjustments to the other two who sat ready to correct their trajectory as needed.

Unlike their landing in the shuttle, the command deck neither felt nor saw any sign of their disturbance of the atmosphere, yet there was a similar feeling of alertness, of minor tension as they collectively piloted the vast vessel to the ground.

As the space port started to become discernible from the visual sensors mounted to the ship's hull, Shepard made his first request for adjustment: "Starboard lateral burst!"

The Normandy eased back into the centre of the laser projection, the surface of the planet growing ever closer.

A mere hundred metres or so before contact, Shepard called for the speed of descent to be arrested.

"Retros firing," Garrus said perfectly calmly, keen not only to be back on familiar soil for a time but also to perform the two errands that had been on his mind since they had begun the return journey.

A few seconds later: "Contact," Wrex confirmed.

Shepard breathed a small sigh before doling out the last order of the mission, "All systems off. Good work, guys."

The three of them rose, collected their possessions, then headed for the primary disembarkation hatch.

"Straight to the doctor's office is it?" Shepard asked as he walked side by side with Garrus down the ramp that led them into Eden Prime's gloriously warm, fresh air.

"In fact, no," Garrus answered, glancing down first at the Commander, then at the box he carried in front of him, "I would like to get these into safe hands first."

Shepard looked at the box too, the strange artefact and the bundles of notes clearly visible through the transparent plastic; he hadn't quite the same interest in the mysteries of Meron as the turian seemed to. "I don't want you delaying treatment just for that," he said with a hint of concern, returning his eyes to Garrus' face.

Garrus chuckled softly, striding towards the space port's terminal. "Neither do I, Commander. Trust me."

They each went their separate ways upon leaving the space port: Shepard to report on the mission to the Alliance, Wrex to 'unwind', and Garrus to the previously unvisited museum on the outskirts of the settlement.

As he had expected, Garrus attracted more than a few curious, sometimes startled glances on his way through Constant: he was already one of the tallest turians even he had come across, and Wrex was perfectly correct in saying he looked quite ludicrous in his undersized uniform. It took him a little while to locate the establishment – after all, each box-like construction looked like every other – of which he knew only that it was run by a small group of scientists, one of whom he hoped would be an archaeologist. He was unsurprised to find the building devoid of other visitors once he had located it and allowed himself to pass a little time peering at the exhibits until he came across one of the curators.

“Good umm... good day,” Garrus said to hail the human woman, his greeting awkward as he was unsure of the time of day.

She had already stolen a glance at him like so many others had done, though she still seemed a little startled at being addressed. “Can I help you?” she asked, her tone edged with a hint of iciness and apprehension as she clutched the duster she was carrying a little tighter.

Garrus had become so accustomed to Commander Shepard’s more open-minded approach to him that he had almost forgotten that some humans still harboured ill-feelings towards turians. Nevertheless, despite an unusually strong feeling of resentment bubbling inside him, Garrus kept his tone and demeanour pleasant as he addressed her, “I’m sorry to bother you, but is there an archaeologist here? I have some items that might be of interest.” He raised the box in his hands a little to draw her attention to it.

She peered at the box’s contents briefly, then jerked her head back towards an inconspicuous door at the far end of the room. “Salarian called Professor Jareth,” she answered tersely, striding away and leaving Garrus’ thank you behind.

Proceeding to the door she had indicated, Garrus knocked.

“Enter!”

Aware that the doorway wasn’t quite of the dimensions he was used to on the Normandy, Garrus bent low to pass safely through it. When he had straightened up, he found himself facing a Salarian examining a fragment of pottery; surely a good omen.

“Professor Jareth?” Garrus enquired as the door slid shut behind him.

“Correct,” the salarian answered, setting the terracotta shard down, “What can I help you with, Mister...” He spoke without a trace of animosity, his tone and the manner in which he was eyeing Garrus and his cargo full of bright interest.

“Garrus. Garrus Vakarian. I’ve just returned to the colony and I think that these might interest you.” He set the box on one of the few clear spaces of table. “I would handle these things with gloves,” he advised, stepping back.

Professor Jareth looked up at him with even greater curiosity. “Gloves, you say? Why?” he asked as he rummaged.

“Well...” Garrus began, weighing his words carefully, “there may be some kind of contamination.”

“Interesting!” Jareth had found a pair of gloves and now approached the box, easing it open and peering at its contents. “Where did you find these things?”

Again Garrus hesitated, uncertain of how much licence his remit afforded him. However, given what he had observed on Meron, it seemed imperative to inform someone knowledgeable of as much detail as necessary; he was willing to wear the responsibility. "I must ask that you keep everything I tell you in strict confidence, Professor. And I mean *strict* confidence."

His aura growing ever more interested, Jareth nodded. "You have my word. Everything you tell me stays between us."

Garrus nodded too, approvingly. "We, that is the team I work with, answered a distress signal from a planet called Meron G194."

Jareth's hand paused as it reached for one of the stacks of notes. "Meron?" he said sharply, looking back up at Garrus, "I know there was a dig going on there. What happened?"

"We...We're not sure." Professor Jareth didn't need to know about his giant kin, "These are the only objects we could retrieve."

"Interesting..." Jareth said again, carefully leafing through what Garrus could tell even from the angle he had where the geologist's notes, "No other artefacts at all?" He posed the question with one hand indicating the odd cuboid.

"Nothing but fragments," Garrus confirmed, eyeing the sand-laden objects with apprehension, "But they're in a warehouse, so they're safe for any salvage missions."

"Shame, but not unsurprising." The salarian's eyes were now skimming the rest of the notes; Garrus could see him glancing back and forth between them and the lone artefact.

He was silent for several moments, then, seeming to realise that he still had company, quickly looked up at Garrus once more. "Thank you for bringing me all these," he said cheerfully, putting everything back in the box, "I'll have everything scanned and I'll be in touch. You never know, we might be naming something after you!"

Garrus answered Jareth's chuckle with a small smile, already moving back towards the door. "Thank you, Professor. Good luck!"

As with all the exquisitely designed human colonies, all the amenities in Constant were well situated for use by its citizens; so, naturally, the hospital was about as far from the museum as it could possibly have been. When Garrus reached finally reached it the settlement was already starting to wind down for the day, the sun sinking towards the horizon

Becoming highly accustomed to doing so, Garrus ducked through the main door to the hospital and, skirting around a huddle of gawping humans, approached the desk. The professionalism of the human receptionist came as a welcome change: he looked calmly up at the towering turian and asked what service he could be.

"I'd like to see a turian doctor if possible," Garrus requested, hoping that his kind were numerous enough on the planet to warrant such a service.

"Is it urgent?" the receptionist asked blandly.

Garrus took a brief moment to think of a way of wording his predicament without sounding ludicrous or melodramatic. "...This time last week I was your height."

“Urgent enough,” the receptionist said, unflappable as ever, “Take the elevator to the top floor, someone will be there to meet you shortly.”

The elevator was clearly designed to accommodate supine patients, but the designer didn’t seem to have accounted for someone in Garrus’ condition: for the duration of the five storey ascent he was hunched beneath the ceiling, almost tempted to sit on the cold metal floor for the sake of his neck.

He was greeted by a sign with arrows pointing in either direction down the hallway, the backlight flickering slightly. He followed the arrow pointing to his left, its labels having been for ‘Auxiliary Human Cardiology’ and the vague ‘Turian Medicine’. The door to the turian wing was locked when he arrived and appeared to be quite empty on his bent-backed inspection.

He was kept waiting for a little over five minutes before the elevator returned, bringing with it a fellow turian in a lab coat.

“Sorry for the wait,” she said as she approached, “We don’t get many turians, so I’ve been earning my stripes in human medicine.”

The door slid open when she got within five metres of it and she gestured for Garrus to enter, then pointed him to one of three beds lined up along the far wall. He sat down, sincerely hoping that he wouldn’t have to spend the night in something even more cramped than his bunk on the Normandy.

“So,” she began, pulling out a tablet and readying her finger to fill in his details, “name?”

“Garrus Vakarian.”

She tapped away for a few seconds, then looked back at him. “Okay, Garrus, I’m Doctor Mehkari. I hear you’ve not always been such a beanpole. Could you tell me the background to your condition?”

For the second time that day, Garrus found himself putting his neck on the line in giving out possibly sensitive information, but he hardly had a choice. “We were on a planet called Meron G194. We found some papers and something an archaeological survey had uncovered. After starting back to Eden Prime I began to grow.”

“We?”

“Me, a human, and a krogan.”

She nodded, having been nudging her claw against the screen throughout his explanation. “And neither of them has grown?”

“No, they’ve undergone no changes any of us have noticed.”

“I see. Is there anything you’ve done that they didn’t?”

Garrus nodded. “I handled what we found, they didn’t. We think perhaps the sand there contains a compound that my body has reacted to.”

She noted this down too. “It’s possible, but we have no records on Meron G194 at all, so it would be hard to say. How would you describe your growth?”

“Sporadic, I guess. Parts of me grew independently and in turns. My feet, then my legs, then my head... Oh, and I gave what we brought back from Meron to the museum here, there might still be some traces of sand on them.”

“I see,” she said again, more thoughtfully this time. She considered her notes for a moment or so, then looked up at him. “To be honest with you, this isn’t something I’ve encountered before. So, I’m going to ask you to stay here overnight so I can observe you.”

Garrus opened his mouth to protest, but she seemed to know what was coming: “I’ll arrange a bigger bed for you, don’t sweat it. I’ll contact the museum and get them to send over a sample of sand and I’ll talk to the resources people. They should have a spare krogan bed, maybe some krogan clothing so you can be a little more comfortable.”

Within an hour Doctor Mehkari’s promises had been fulfilled: a new, extra large bed had been set up by the ward’s windows, a similarly sized gown folded on top of it. While they had been waiting, she had made a start on progressing towards a treatment for Garrus’ condition, the first step of which had been to extract a sample of his blood. Having sent the glass file to a lab elsewhere in the hospital, she told him to take off his uniform to allow her to measure and examine him; he extricated himself from his coverings with some difficulty, and was quite dismayed when she concluded, thanks to her laser-powered measuring device, that he was seven feet, four inches tall.

“That’s not normal for a turian, is it?” he asked her apprehensively as he slipped the gown over his head, the hem of it falling to a little below his knees; unflattering though it was with its vaguely floral-patterned light blue material and cut that was designed for a krogan’s very different physique, it was at least more comfortable than his uniform had become and allowed him to move freely.

“It’s not unheard of,” Mehkari answered, drawing back the bedclothes for him, “but it’s not normal, no.”

It was a relief to find that he could lay completely flat on this bed, even having a little room to spare. He glanced out the window at the now dark sky, the blackness broken only by the lights of the haphazard buildings that constituted Constant and those illuminating the streets and alleys between them.

“You won’t be used to the Eden night, will you?” she said, interrupting his contemplation.

She was quite right: Garrus had become accustomed to life aboard the Normandy where sleep cycles were run on Earth-standard time. He shook his head.

“Then I’ll get you a little something to help you adjust.” She bustled to a storeroom at the other end of the ward, returning with a bottle and a tiny plastic cup. She poured out a measure of thick, greenish liquid which she then handed to him. “That should let you get a good twenty hours’ rest. Don’t really want you to be restless and wandering around in the middle of the night.”

After making sure he’d drunk the entire cupful, she retrieved the now empty vessel from him. “I’ll see you in the morning with a tablet to keep you entertained while you’re with us.”

He nodded and settled down for the night, muttering thanks through the cloud of nervous uncertainty fogging his brain – or was that the liquid drowsiness he’d just ingested?

She smiled, taking a few steps back towards the main door. “Don’t worry, we’ll at the very least halt your growth soon. Good night.”

Somehow being in a hospital under the care of a fellow turian fully trained in their race's medicine, perhaps combined with spending what was to him almost a full day cycle unconscious, had subconsciously convinced Garrus that his problems were at an end, or at least that of gaining extra inches during his hours of slumber. It therefore came as a startling surprise the following morning to find that his feet were dangling off the end of the bed, a bed which was designed for the large bodies of krogans.

He sat up the moment his mind registered the meaning of the lack of support his feet were experiencing. Pulling the covers up to expose his lower half, he let out a groan of fearful confusion: not only did his legs look longer, his feet were unquestionably larger than he remembered them being too.

"Good morning! What's the...ah."

Doctor Mehkari had stopped in the process of striding towards him, the promised tablet clutched in her hand. She placed it on the nightstand she had commandeered from one of the other beds, then drew her measurer from her pocket.

"I'm afraid you're quite right," she said after shining the laser on his feet, "there's a substantial difference to yesterday. Think you could stand up for me?"

He rose in the clumsy fashion he recalled from the early days of his growth, feeling that, though there must have been something in the neighbourhood of ten feet of vertical room in the ward, he was getting too close to the ceiling for comfort.

Her laser did its thing over the rest of his body, then Garrus braced himself for the bad news.

"I'm sorry to say that you're up to eight-foot-one this morning," she said, her eyes on the numbers displayed on the back of the laser, "But it's all in your legs, it seems. Your upper body is exactly the same as it was yesterday."

Garrus wasn't consoled by this. "It's always just been one part of me, just my feet or whatever. Why is it speeding up?"

She patted his arm lightly, trying to comfort his panic, "I imagine it's simply because you rested for so much longer than you normally do. More time for whatever is causing all this to do its dirty work."

Though her words did make some sense to him, the fact that she now seemed barely taller than his waist reinforced the feeling that he was growing more quickly. He sat back down on the bed heavily, thoroughly discouraged.

"How about some better news?" she offered.

Garrus had to bite back the uncharacteristically scathing scoff that sprang to his throat, instead simply nodding his permission for her to continue.

"The results of your blood test should be back soon, and the museum sent through a whole raft of material which the guys in the lab are working on now too, so we should have a good idea of what's causing you to grow by the end of the day if nothing else."

This was marginally cheering, that he had to concede. He raised his head enough to be looking down at her – still shorter than him even though he was sitting – and managed to force out a small smile.

She smiled right back, only wider. “That’s it. You just try to relax. That,” she indicated the tablet she’d delivered, “has access to everything you could possibly need to entertain you, so just kick back and use it to your heart’s content.

“I’ll try to arrange a few more things to accommodate you,” she said, then glanced out of the window. The sky was packed with darkly ominous clouds which cast a deep gloom over the settlement, many of whose lights were still on despite night having long since passed. “It’s not supposed to be nice out today, but if it clears tomorrow you’ll be able to chill on the balcony.”

Garrus nodded again, trying his best to find these suggestions as brightening for his mood as she intended them.

“I’ll be back to check on you regularly, and if you need anything you can contact me or reception on your tablet. Just try to take your mind off things, okay?”

Another nod.

As she walked back to the ward door, Garrus settled himself as comfortably as he could on what was now a too-small bed, the tablet seeming tiny in his hands as he investigated what it had to offer.

It turned out that Doctor Mehkari was quite correct in saying that the tablet would have ample resources to keep even Garrus entertained: newscasts, music, visual media new and old, fiction and non-fiction, messaging applications... He snorted at the mental image of him playing on of the thousands of holographic games he’d found in the device’s many menus; if he was honest with himself, though, he would have been curious to give one or two of them a try.

But something held him back from engaging in pure recreation just yet: it would be wise to inform someone else among the Normandy’s crew of his situation. Naturally, his first instinct was to try to get hold of the man in charge himself.

He opened the contact search of the audio-visual communicator and spoke his request aloud to the rectangular piece of plastic and electronics: “Commander Shepard of the SSV Normandy.”

‘Searching’ flashed up on the screen for the briefest of moments, quickly replaced by ‘Connecting’. Within seconds, Commander Shepard’s face appeared on the screen, frowning into the camera.

“Who is- Garrus!” he exclaimed, his expression and tone changing instantly upon recognition of the caller.

“Hello, Commander,” Garrus said, nodding an additional greeting, “I just wanted to let you know that I am in the hospital now.”

A crease of concern formed on Shepard’s forehead. “How’re you doing?” he asked, the picture shaking a little as he moved from standing to sitting.

Garrus shrugged, trying to appear relatively nonchalant about what was happening to him. “I’m still growing, but they are doing tests and I’m sure it will all be fine, like you said.”

Shepard nodded, his expression clearing slightly. "At least you're getting treatment now. I'll try to make time to see you today or tomorrow," he said, an earnest look in his eyes.

Garrus smiled, more genuinely than he had done to the doctor. "That would be great, Commander. Always good to see a familiar face."

"I bet," Shepard said with a nod, "I gotta go now, but call me if there's any news."

"Of course, Commander."

"Good. Take care of yourself, you hear?" Shepard stared determinedly through the camera at the turian, making it clear that this was more than just well-wishes.

Chuckling, Garrus nodded back. "Of course, Commander."

Disconnecting the call and feeling that little bit less anxious about everything that was happening, Garrus started to indulge his curiosity in those games he'd spotted.

Maintaining her reputation for keeping her promises, Doctor Mehkari returned a little while later with two human porters in tow who rigged up a makeshift bed comprised of multiple mattresses strapped together, a system which she assured Garrus could be easily adjusted to accommodate any further increases in his stature. They had even gone to the trouble of constructing a chair out of what Garrus recognised to be two metal pallets – one as the base, one as the back – and a couple more mattresses; this, Mehkari informed him, could be moved outside when the weather brightened up should he wish.

After thanking all three of them profusely, Garrus relocated to his new and surprisingly comfortable chair while the porters wheeled his previous bed out of the ward and Mehkari left to check on the lab's progress on his test, assuring him that sustenance was on its way too.

However, although several turian-suitable means arrived over the course of the day as she had said, Doctor Mehkari herself was rather more absent than her assurances might have suggested; the results of his blood test were likewise elusive. He did his best to keep his mind otherwise engaged with the plethora of options the tablet offered, but the longer he was forced to wait the more agitated he became; moreover, he started to suspect that his body was undergoing still more changes given how the back of the improvised seat appeared to be supporting him less as the day wore on.

He eventually resorted to pacing up and down the ward, thoughts and images of possible futures jockeying for space in his mind's eye. What if his condition turned out to be terminal and he was destined to continue growing for the rest of his life? What if Mehkari came back to him with a big, fat blank on what was causing his bizarre transformation?

He growled under his breath, feeling a deep but controllable urge to go down to the lab – wherever it was – and curse out these supposed eggheads for taking so long to figure out what was wrong with him. Didn't they realise that his life could have been at stake here? And if not his own mortality, his quality of life was surely going to take a dive off a cliff if there was no cure.

He strode over to the door to the store room to make a point no one but he would be able to appreciate: how could he continue to do his work on the Normandy, or live a proper, fulfilling life at all when the average doorway hardly came up to his chest?

Flinging himself back into his chair and feeling annoyed at everything in the known universe, Garrus waited.

When the doctor finally did reappear, Garrus was hard pushed not to yell 'Finally!' at her. Instead he forced himself to only express his keen interest in what news she had for him, pushing his surliness to the back of his mind.

"Sorry to keep you waiting!" she exclaimed as she came over to where he was sitting, her own tablet held in front of her, "I'm sure you've been itching to hear back from me all day."

You bet I have...

"The lab took a little longer because the stuff from the museum arrived and they wanted to compare the composition of the sand against your blood. Anyway," she said, his stern silence nudging her towards coming to the point, "the tests show that there's no sign of even a trace of Meronian sand in your blood."

He stared at her, somewhat incredulously. "So what the hell *is* making me grow?" he asked impatiently.

Mehkari raised a hand, apparently in an attempt to calm him. "We're working on a strong hypothesis. It seems that the weird little box thing you found on Meron is full of some kind of liquid which is being analysed right now. We don't know what it is just yet, but there's certainly something in your blood sample that doesn't belong, so we suspect it's that which is causing your bodily alterations. Speaking of which, as it's nearing the end of the day, I'd like to measure you again, if that's okay with you."

Garrus got to his feet as he assumed she wanted, watching her go through the familiar process of passing the laser over his body without really seeing. Now, at last, things were starting to make sense: if it had been the sand, surely Shepard and Wrex would have got at least a little bit on themselves from handling their suits and helmets; neither of them had touched the artefact but he had, so it seemed almost painfully obvious now that it was the source of all that was happening. But how had this mystery liquid got into his body? The object hadn't been damp in the slightest as far as he could remember, there had never been any residue on his hands after handling it, there wasn't a hint of even the tiniest hole in its surface when he had examined it.

"You've grown a bit more," Mehkari concluded, slipping the measuring device back into her pocket, "Your torso and arms this time, but your head and neck haven't changed."

Garrus eyed her, definitely feeling that he was looking down further to meet her upturned gaze than he had done that morning. "It's speeding up, I know it is," he said in a flat, gloomy voice.

She hesitated, clearly wanting to be reassuring, but eventually nodded. "Yes. Compared to what you report happening before you made planetfall you're growing at a slightly greater rate."

"Slightly'," he muttered, surprising himself that he had said it aloud.

"We should know the composition of the liquid by the morning," she told him, ushering him back into his chair, "Once we know that we'll know what countermeasures to take. Everything is in hand."

He looked at her scathingly but said nothing.

Understanding that her presence wasn't too welcome at that moment, she took her leave, promising more food before he turned in for the night.

A bed of four mattresses strapped together was never going to be the most comfortable – Garrus was able to feel the valleys between each beneath his back and legs – but nevertheless he slept, and slept deeply, thanks to another dose of drowsiness medication.

He awoke the next morning to breakfast in bed, a temporary and suitably scaled shower set up in one corner of the ward just for him, sunlight pouring in through the window bringing with it the prospect of relaxing on the drying balcony, and a message from Commander Shepard promising a visit later in the day. The only dampener on his return to consciousness was that his head and neck had grown overnight, taking him to eight-foot-eight.

"What does the lab have to say for itself?" he asked Doctor Mehkari from behind his shower curtain that was an old-fashioned tarp hanging from a metal bar.

She hesitated in answering, drawing Garrus' suspicion.

"We know what's inside the artefact now, and what's in your bloodstream," she began, pausing again.

"And the catch is?" Garrus prompted, now emerging dressed in his new gown fashioned from a bedsheet: the one he had been provided with previously had been starting to look a little too risqué on him.

"Would you like your chair moved to the balcony? There are a couple of porters- "

"The catch *is*?" he pressed, more aggressively this time.

She cleared her throat, taking half a step back from her towering kin before giving the answer reluctantly, "We know the chemistry of the liquid now, but we don't yet understand how it works.

"But we do have something to go on!" she continued hurriedly, seeing him glowering down at her, "Element Zero is the predominant ingredient, so it's just a matter of figuring out how it works on living tissue."

Slightly mollified, Garrus turned his attention to her previous offer to diffuse the tension: "The balcony would be great, thank you."

It was much more difficult for Garrus to feel distressed or anxious about life once he was sitting in the bright sunshine, more often than not listening to music or audiocasts while simply basking in the warming rays pouring down from the heavens. Every so often someone would arrive with some kind of nourishment, at which point he would emerge from his semi-meditative state to eat while watching something with the tablet propped up on the small glass table that was a permanent fixture of the balcony. In fact, he had hardly even thought of the predicament in which he still found himself and the lack of further reports from the lab until late in the afternoon when he was finally tiring of his inactivity.

The arrival of Wrex and Commander Shepard was well-timed in that respect.

"How's the patient doing?" Shepard asked as he and Wrex stepped out onto the balcony to join their compatriot, both carrying chairs.

Pleased though he was to see the two of them, Garrus couldn't help but look upon them somehow differently to how he remembered: though he knew that they appeared smaller simply because he was already much larger than when he had last seen them, there was a certain air of...insignificance about them.

Garrus smiled regardless, watching Shepard take his seat wearing an expression of deep concern. "I'm okay, Commander. The staff are looking after me quite well and investigation into the cause is ongoing."

Shepard nodded sympathetically, then turned his head to look at Wrex.

Garrus looked at him too. Wrex had placed his chair down next to the human's, but was staring Garrus up and down, seeming both intrigued and appalled by what he saw.

"Talk about big foot," he muttered, his eyes fixing briefly on the turian's hugely enlarged claws resting on the tiled floor.

Garrus grinned, raising one foot towards Wrex. "You like it, little krogan?" he mocked, wiggling his toes, causing a few of the specks of dust and dirt clinging to their surface to dislodge and drift to the floor.

"Hey..."

Before he could say any more, Wrex found that oversized appendage suddenly pushing against his chest, sending him topping into the chair behind him. Garrus laughed at the krogan's stunned expression, delighting in how easily he had fallen; perhaps there were benefits to being so large after all.

Looking disquieted, Shepard steered the conversation in a new direction: "Any sign of them finding a treatment for you?" he asked, ignoring Wrex's indignation and being not only manhandled, but also his supposed superior's ignoring the act.

"I already told you," Garrus snapped, "investigation is ongoing. You'll know when they've started treating me because I'll be heading back down to your level."

Wrex and Shepard exchanged nervous, perturbed glances at the turian's offputtingly assertive new attitude.

Oblivious or uncaring, Garrus continued speaking, "You were completely wrong about the cause, of course. The sand has nothing to do with it. It's all to do with that artefact we found."

"Next to the giant salarian," Wrex said. He and Shepard shared another look, this time of dawning, horrified comprehension.

"Did we find any other artefacts?" Garrus asked with obvious impatience, "Did *you* find anything at all? *Of course* the one next to the giant salarian!"

The one-sided discourse was interrupted by the arrival of Doctor Mehkari on the balcony's threshold. "Sorry to intrude, but it's time for Garrus' evening check-up," she said with a light smile, clearly unaware of the atmosphere that had developed in the deepening glow of the setting sun.

Wrex and Shepard jumped to their feet immediately. "We were just leaving," the human said hurriedly, prodding Wrex in the back to get him to move towards the door.

"Already?" Garrus asked in disappointment. He heaved an exasperated sigh, then rose to his feet.

It was instantly obvious to both he and Mehkari that things had changed drastically over the course of the day, and the two visitors were quick to register the renewed tension in the air. That morning Garrus had estimated that his smaller kin was level with his midriff, but now all three of the smaller figures before him were barely as tall as his race's characteristically flared hips.

Brushing them aside, he stepped through the mercifully floor-to-ceiling glass door back into the ward proper. However, when he made to straighten up fully, the top of his head collided hard with the ceiling.

Snarling and rubbing his crown, he saw the flicker of red that was Mehkari's laser measurer. He turned his gaze down to her when he knew she had finished, vaguely registering Wrex and Shepard edging towards the door.

"Well?" he growled at the doctor.

"F-Full body growth..." she said nervously, giving the actual figure with great reluctance: "Ten-foot-two."

Garrus goggled at her silently for a second, then came the explosion: "TEN-FOOT- GO FIND OUT WHAT THE HELL THOSE PUNY MORONS IN THE LAB ARE DOING!"

Not needing to be told twice, Mehkari, Shepard, and Wrex dived for the door and hurried to the elevator, leaving Garrus to vent his frustrations alone.

"Doctor! You *have* to find a cure for this soon," Shepard said urgently as the elevator doors opened and they piled in, Wrex nodding vigorously by his side, "Garrus found that artefact beside a giant salarian. Giant as in fifty feet or more."

Now she shared their horror. "I'll have the lab working on it around the clock and I'll administer the strongest sedative we have to Garrus to keep him calm since he seems to be struggling with his emotions. We'll keep this under control, I promise you."

The large dose of an exceptionally powerful sedative had Garrus dead to the world within seconds; had he not had that then combined with another sleeping draught, he might not have slept through that night. His sleep was disturbed, however, his limbs and face twitching throughout the night, as though everything but his conscious mind was aware that things were very much not right. He didn't wake once, though, so his consciousness remained oblivious to what was so distressing the rest of his being.

The sun was rising into a sky as clear as there had been the day before, but it's brightness and warmth seemed to cringe away from the top floor ward as a roar exploded from within its walls.

Garrus had risen from his slumber to find himself laying on the collapsed remains of what had the night before been a functional, sturdy, oversized bed. His feet, far from merely hanging off the end of the mattresses, now extended far across the room. Pushing himself furiously into a sitting

position, his head crashed into the ceiling as it had done the day before, only this time he wasn't yet on his feet.

Footsteps were hurrying down the hallway towards the ward. The door slid open and Doctor Mehkari stumbled across the threshold, letting out a small shriek of shock as she saw her fellow turian, sat hunched beneath the ceiling, the room and everything around him looking like pieces of a children's playset by comparison.

"Garrus!" she barely more than squeaked, stepping no further into the room so as not to leave the protective aura of the door, "J-Just stay calm, we're working on it!"

The terror Garrus thought he would be feeling at his overnight explosion in size, while still present, was fighting what felt like a losing battle against other emotions and senses of self that, he knew now, had been bubbling just beneath the surface yesterday. Until now he had looked to the doctor as a source of comfort, someone who was trying to help him out of his increasingly scary predicament. But was she that, really? Did she deserve to command such respect? Wasn't she just some tiny, pathetic nothing who was at *his* mercy?

"You...You don't have a cure?" he asked, his face twitching as the Garrus of old struggled to maintain its grip on his body's reins, too intent on other matters to notice a lack of the familiar blue hue of his left eye's vision.

"N-N-Not yet, b- "

As she shook her head, calm, respectful, polite, likable Garrus was thrust aside by the beast that had emerged within him. He bellowed again, dragging himself forward onto all-fours, eyeing her with a malevolent grin.

Mehkari screamed. In the split second before she dived through the door and activated first its deadlock, then the hospital's alarm system, she caught a glimpse of the deep dent Garrus' head had made in the solid metal ceiling.

A loud, resonating thud had her leaping out of her skin; the door next to her had buckled under the force of something extremely heavy being swung against it with tremendous strength. She sprinted for the stairs with all the speed she possessed, for the elevators would have been put out of commission by her activation of the alarms.

Furious that his quarry had escaped him so easily and determined not to remain squeezed into this seemingly tiny room anymore, Garrus' eyes found the windows. He crawled towards them, the floor shaking under his weight, breaking straight through the thin panes of glass with minimal effort.

The sunlight hit him as he was starting to struggle to his feet; he let out a loud cry of pain and toppled over the edge of the balcony, falling five storeys before landing on his back on the street below. Screams of terror erupted around him as the citizens going about their daily business began to flee the scene of a giant turian writhing on the ground.

Garrus could feel something struggling feebly beneath him, but his mind was focused on something that was, to him, far, far more important. His eyes were fixed on his feet, or rather his left, on which something truly bizarre was taking place: one of his toes, just one, was ballooning rapidly, swelling to twice, three times, four times the size of his neighbour. Even as he watched, out of the corner of his eye he saw his lower right leg shoot out, pushing his as yet unchanged right foot several feet beyond his left.

Instinctively his hands sprang to his head which had suddenly begun to ache terribly: he could feel it inflating beneath his touch, though the change seemed far less significant to his right hand which, when he held it out in front of him, proved to now have a palm far too big for the tiny fingers that sprouted from it.

In a haze of pain and confusion he watched, as if from another's body, as his own continued to grow one bit at a time. Each time one body part eclipsed all others for comparative size, another shot outwards to overtake it.

In the minutes it took for it all to subside – though it felt like hours as far as Garrus was concerned – every part of his body seemed to take a turn at leading the pack. One moment he had an arm that reached all the way down to his feet, the next he had hips so broad they made his legs look like vestigial growths. His jaw thudded onto his chest, jutting aggressively so far from his head that it entered his field of vision, then a finger on his left hand extended so far beyond the others it appeared more like a tentacle.

When it all finally ceased, leaving him as proportional as ever he had been but many times bigger than he had been even first thing that morning, he lay motionless upon the ground but for his chest rising and falling in deep, rapid breaths; whatever had been below him had stopped moving too. His eyes were closed, the air around him quiet and still, his mind empty but recovering, accustoming itself to commanding the body of a titan.

He was in no hurry to do anything now, he felt nothing compelling him to act. When he was ready, he opened his eyes and gazed up at the cloudless sky above him. He had heard that peoples of old believed that all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful beings who ruled their lives resided in the heavens; if this was true, if these deities existed, they now bowed to a god of their own.

He pushed himself to his feet and immediately felt a rush of heady, addictive power: the 'city' around him, the hashed together array of metal rectangles, seemed nothing more than a model village to the gargantuan new master of this planet. This outpost of mighty spacefaring races was now merely Garrus' playground, its inhabitants equally lowly objects for his amusement.

He had to try his strength, to discover just how powerful he was. Now.

The building that caught his attention immediately was the one from which he had come; it was already damaged, he could see the shattered window, but that wasn't why he wanted it to be his first victim: it had the inexcusable audacity to be at least as tall as he was, and that simply wouldn't do.

A broad grin spread across the turian's face as he both felt and heard objects, once considered by him large and practically immovable, shudder, bounce, and tremble as his feet hit the ground in his approach to the hospital. He raised one hand, his thumb entering through the window he had already broken to grip the ceiling of the ward while his fingers bit into the roof – both gave way most satisfactorily to his lazy grasp. He wrenched the metal plates hard towards him. The screech of tearing metal echoed through the nearby streets, then half of the hospital's roof crashed to the ground. The other half quickly met the same fate, exposing the entire top floor to the elements; more importantly, however, it meant that the building no longer overshadowed the almighty being that ruled over it.

"Garrus!"

The turian growled, low and threatening to any who might hear the sound: who dared summon him?

When he had turned in the direction of the voice, he saw, standing on the roof of a wisely, deferentially smaller building than the hospital had been, none other than Commander Shepard. Had the speaker been anyone else, perhaps, Garrus may not have tolerated the lack of seemly subservient silence, but Shepard was, for now, permitted to address him.

Garrus said nothing in response, however, merely staring down at the tiny figure, waiting for it to prove its intrusion worthy of his attention.

"Just calm down, okay?" Shepard said, one foot on the raised edge of the building, the opposite hand ready on his gun, "You're not thinking straight, this...this whole size thing has gone to your head."

Garrus laughed mockingly. "Wouldn't it have gone to yours? Doesn't it make sense that the most powerful being on this little rock should be the one that rules it in whatever manner seems fitting?"

Shepard shook his head, his tone imploring. "This isn't you talking, Garrus. You need to get back in control of your own head!"

"This is me now, little human, like it or not."

"Garrus, please!"

"Enough talking," the turian drowned Shepard's voice easily, a mere whisper would have been enough, "If you're not out of my sight in thirty seconds, you become just another little bug as far as I'm concerned."

"Listen- "

"Thirty seconds," Garrus said, low and threatening. He leaned down, all the way down to bring his face just a few feet away from Shepard, the deep rumble of his voice blowing the human back a few steps, "Tick. Tock."

Shepard, reluctantly, fled.

The hospital's lab was, mercifully in such a scenario, located in the building's basement. Despite being able to feel the tremors and hear the sounds of chaos starting to be wrought outside, those barricaded underground were continuing to investigate the cause and solution of the problem now bringing Constant to its knees. Commander Shepard, Wrex, and Doctor Mehkari had been summoned by the chief of the hospital's research division.

"Well?" Wrex prompted the moment the grey-haired human had finished introducing himself.

"We do, at last, have some good news," the scientist, one Doctor Hansen, informed them with some moderated excitement in his voice, "We now know exactly *how* your turian friend became...what he is, so it's just a matter of finding a means of reversing the effects now."

"Aaaaaaaaand?" Shepard said, frustrated with Hansen's apparent desire for a dramatic reveal despite the urgency of the situation.

The scientist beckoned, leading the three guests over to a board covered in charts, diagrams, and formulae.

"It's a modified form of Element Zero," he announced, gesturing to a formula, "It has been designed to bind with haemoglobin. That much we found out fairly quickly, but we were unsure why it acted so slowly and didn't affect the entire body at first." He paused to wipe his forehead, then went on, "It seems that it self-replicates when in the bloodstream, attaching to more blood cells and gaining a greater coverage through the body as a result.

"But that didn't explain why the growth only accelerated once the subject reached Eden Prime. The answer is ambient starlight: onboard your ship he would only have been exposed to the light of very distant stars, so the Element Zero wouldn't have had a sufficient energy source to do more than multiply and only grew whichever body part it had settled in during the subject's rest hours. Now that there's ambient starlight everywhere, the Element Zero has ample energy!"

Doctor Mehkari nodded slowly in agreement. "Garrus' growth did accelerate dramatically after spending an entire day basically just sunbathing," she said musingly.

"Exactly!" Hansen said excitedly, pointing at her in affirmation.

"The secret to the chemical's transmission is in the design of this artefact here," he resumed, picking up the rectangular object with a gloved hand, "There's a very well concealed reservoir inside and the outside is porous, but the capillaries that connect to the reservoir are only opened through direct contact with a warm object." To demonstrate, Hansen picked up a small object glowing a soft orange colour and pressed it against one of the artefact's sides; when he removed it, the surface of the heat source was glistening with a bluish liquid.

"The extra additives to the mixture inside the reservoir are to help the liquid to be absorbed rapidly through the skin. If any of you were to touch a finger to this stuff for even the briefest moment, you wouldn't see anything on your skin by the time you withdrew it," he concluded, looking quite pleased with himself.

"So...how do you counter that?" Shepard asked after a few seconds, having taken a moment to absorb the information being thrown at him.

Hansen inexplicably beamed. "That's the question, isn't it?" he said, apparently thrilled by the challenge, "Simply eradicating the existing chemical doesn't work, we've tried and the subject simply maintains their size at the moment of eradication. Instead we need to work *with* the chemical before erasing it, namely finding a way of inducing size reduction instead of increase. Of course, we would have to try not to over-shrink your friend when we figure out how to shrink him at all."

As Wrex in particular looked sceptical, Hansen added, "It's only a matter of time, my friends! When, not if."

"Doctor Hansen," Shepard said a little testily, "we need this...antidote or whatever as soon as possible. The longer we have to wait the more damage Garrus will inflict. So, if you can't shrink Garrus right now, we'll need some kind of interim plan to minimise the damage."

"Well..." Hansen began, one finger tapping his dimpled chin, "he's a member of your crew, have you tried talking him down?"

Shepard nodded. "Garrus made it quite clear that he wasn't interested in what I had to say."

"Why would he be?" Wrex cut in.

The other three turned, staring at him in surprise at his seemingly overt show of disrespect for his commanding officer.

"I don't mean it like that," he said defensively, reading their expressions, "I mean more like...would you listen to an ant trying to give you orders? Because that must be almost how we seem to Garrus now. I'd say, short of launching missiles at him, the only thing that might calm him down is advice from an equal."

Up above ground, terror reigned. A trail of destruction led from the hospital to where Garrus was now, massive, two-toed, clawed craters were cut into the street, several containing the flattened forms of those too sluggish to dodge out of the giant's path.

He had recently quite literally torn a building in half and was wadding the mixture of metal and plastic into a ball several metres in diameter and was eyeing up the crowd fleeing down a dead-end street. Kneeling down, he rolled the bumpy, uneven spheroid down the alley, watching it bounce and bobble along before it hit the wall at the far end.

"Heh heh heh, strike," he congratulated himself, grinning evilly in pleasure at his destructive, mayhem-inducing fun.

Before he could turn around to continue his rampage else where in the city, something in his peripheral vision caught his attention: down below, dashing along the very street Garrus had just used as an impromptu bowling alley, was a tiny lone figure. It was sprinting, not away from him, but towards him, clearly intent on escaping between his legs.

"Where do you think you're going?" Garrus asked, his deep rumble stopping the human in his tracks.

The man seemed to be stammering something, more than likely pleading for his life, but his terrified voice was so quiet it didn't filter up to Garrus' ears from its origin down by his ankles.

Grinning, the gigantic turian raised his foot and knocked the man onto his back on the wrecked, potholed street with the merest nudge of one claw. That same foot hovered over the helpless little human who stared up at it, the tan-coloured sole covered with dust, powdered glass, slivers of metal, tiny shards of plastic, and a few smears of something scarlet. The twin toes, each at least as long as the man's legs with pointed claws that would have reached on up to his chin, wiggled tauntingly above him, as though those appendages knew of their own accord that they could snuff out his life however and whenever they pleased.

And then they dropped, those two massive digits and the foot to which they were attached plummeting towards the ground. With a shriek, the man dived to his right, escaping being flattened into the asphalt by a matter of a few inches.

"A lively one, I see," Garrus observed from high above. His toes curled, biting deep into the street, gouging its deepest hole yet. "A game, perhaps?" he asked, though the other party had no say in the matter, "You try to get past me, I don't move from this spot. If you manage that, I let you go free. If you don't..." He left the rest to the man's imagination, lifting his foot again and letting the crushed mixture of asphalt and dirt tumble from his toes to pile upon the ground.

The man, with little other choice, began his dance with death. Left and right he dashed, jinking and dodging as the two giant feet swung over, past, and in front of him. Flecks of everything

those two appendages had picked up during their owner's romp through the city pelted him each time they passed within a couple of feet of him, but they did not slow him as he sprinted back and forth.

Garrus was watching, an idle smirk on his face as his living plaything did what it was intended for: providing him with amusement. The movement of his feet, though violent and lethal they seemed at ground level, were effortless to the turian.

And then, wishing to bring the game to an end one way or another, Garrus stamped down hard where he thought the man's path would be. But the human was wise to this: already starting to change directions when he saw the foot rushing towards the ground, he motored between the titan's legs and towards freedom.

WHAM!

The human's victory was short lived as the very foot he'd outwitted slammed down onto him as he fled.

"Too bad, I lied," Garrus said, almost bored. He twisted his foot from side to side a couple of times, grinding the tiny body into the ground, then strode away without a backwards glance.

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Yep."

"And you know what you have to do?"

Wrex stopped walking, standing half in sunlight, half in the jagged shadow of one of Garrus' victims. "I grow, I tell Garrus to calm down, I restrain him if he refuses," he said with an obviously impatient sigh, "I've got it. Let's just do it already."

Commander Shepard nodded and, with a feeling of great trepidation, held out the cuboid artefact in his gloved hands. Wrex touched it for barely a second before withdrawing his bare fingers.

"Right. Get into the sunlight. It should only take a few minutes for you to grow as big as Garrus. I'll be watching from the hospital," Shepard told the krogan, already hurrying back the way they had come.

"I know," Wrex grunted, stepping out of the partial shadow, waiting for the changes to begin.

Garrus' rampage had taken him in a wide arc from the hospital, ruined buildings and vast footprints documenting his progress. He was now starting to loop back towards where he had started, though it did not seem to be a conscious decision: all that mattered to the turian was that he continue to have things to destroy and tiny people with whom to toy.

He had found a wide, single story building, far more square than the rest of the city's rectangular constructions, and had one foot set upon its roof: he was gradually leaning more and more weight onto it, the game being to see when the structure would collapse. However, barely ten seconds into this test of architectural prowess, sounds reached his ears that weren't the creaking

and grinding of thick metal girders: he could hear footfalls, at least as heavy his own were, rattling the surrounding buildings. He turned, his eyes finding a giant krogan picking their way through the maze of partially demolished boxes towards him.

"This place is mine, Wrex!" he shouted, his booming voice carrying to every corner of the city, "Go find your own city, if not your own planet!"

Wrex said nothing yet, lumbering closer until a single block of jumbled, as yet untouched edifices separated the two giants. "I'm supposed to be telling you to stop having fun," he said, a grin gradually spreading across his face, "but I think it's *you* who's got the right idea."

Garrus watched as the krogan bent down and seized one of the rectangular buildings, then ripped it from the ground, plumes of dust billowing from its mutilated foundations.

"Yessssssssssssss!" Wrex cried in ecstasy, squeezing the metal box in his arms until it crumpled.

The turian laughed, nodding appreciatively. "Okay, I like your style. You can stay."

The rate and scale of Constant's destruction instantly doubled. Perhaps more than doubled: while Garrus' pleasure came from testing his strength against buildings, finding new ways to command destruction on his surroundings, and to taunt and tease those people fleeing from his rampage, Wrex seemed to delight in merely doing as much damage as possible.

More ominously than that, there was a streak of real bloodlust in the krogan's expression whenever he spied a tiny figure scurrying away from him. Wrex cackled uproariously as he stomped his feet repeatedly on the crowd that had spilled out of the building off which he had just torn the roof, his eyes downcast to drink in the mayhem below.

Even Garrus was slightly unnerved by the fashion in which Wrex was finding his fun, his own taste for destruction seeming to diminish, distracted by what was being wrought a few streets away. As several humans scurried past him, yet he merely stomped half-heartedly behind them, doing little more than jarring their fleeing footsteps.

"Well, look who it is!" he heard Wrex crow.

Looking away from the gaggle he had permitted to escape, his eyes fell upon the krogan approaching the exposed up storey of the hospital where a lone figure was backing away from him. Curious as to what the krogan had found, Garrus too closed the distance to the start of his rampage.

When he was close enough, he could hear a faint but familiar voice shouting up at his fellow giant: "Wrex! You're supposed to be stopping Garrus, not joining him!"

It was Commander Shepard, retreating from his lookout point on the still intact balcony to his escape route of the stairs.

Wrex leered down at him, raising a hand threateningly. "I told you earlier, we don't take orders from ants," he growled sneeringly, "I think you should be under my foot, where all you bugs belong."

"No!"

Garrus was now striding purposefully towards the hospital, ploughing through buildings as if they weren't even there in his determined haste.

Wrex turned his attention towards him, looking startled. "What?"

"Not Commander Shepard," the turian said firmly, pushing Wrex away from his prey as soon as he was within arm's reach.

The krogan snorted derisively. "A bug's a bug. They all deserve the same- "

"Not Shepard," Garrus repeated, shoving Wrex back another few steps, "We don't take orders from him, but we don't harm him either."

As the two behemoths quarrelled, their voices echoing through the streets and beyond, two people appeared at the top of the stairs behind Shepard, both panting heavily.

"We've...done it!" gasped Doctor Hansen, holding up two vials of green liquid.

Shepard stared, relief starting to bubble up inside him. "An antidote? And it works?"

Hansen nodded, beaming. "Probably! It was a simple matter of changing how Eleme- "

Doctor Mehkari snatched the vials from her blabbering colleague and loaded one of them into the chamber of a rifle.

"I imagine you're a better shot than we are, Commander, even with a tranq gun," she said, shutting Hansen up with a withering glare as she handed the weapon to Shepard.

"Just shoot them?" Shepard asked, his intense stare telling Hansen that he needed only the minimum of detail.

Hansen swallowed, cleared his throat, then nodded. "It only needs to get into their bloodstream."

The two goliaths were grappling now, Wrex fighting to get past Garrus to the hospital while the latter restrained him as best he could; however, giant or not, his turian physique would not be able to hold off the more powerful krogan indefinitely.

Shepard raised the rifle to eye level, squinted with one eye, lining up a shot on the more volatile Wrex first. The dart vanished out of the muzzle with a soft 'fft' when he pulled the trigger, hitting the krogan in the chest. Wrex continued to struggle for several more seconds, forcing the turian aside, then slumped abruptly unconscious. Garrus let his limp form drop to the ground with a thump that shook everything in its vicinity.

Looking about in confusion for a few seconds, the turian's eyes found the source of Wrex's insensibility just in time to see Shepard training the rifle on him instead. In the heartbeat before the second dart found its target in his right arm, all Garrus could think of doing was opening his mouth in surprise. And then he was falling backwards, eyes fluttering closed, the building opposite the hospital, already partly demolished by him hours earlier, crushed completely by his unconscious body.

When he began to rise from the depths of nothingness a long while later, Garrus could remember nothing. He didn't recall travelling to Meron and what he had witnessed and discovered there. He didn't have a single memory of the journey home. His stint in hospital would have been news to him, and what came after would have seemed so far-fetched as to be utterly unbelievable.

He certainly didn't know where he was now either. His senses were fading back to function; though his eyes remained closed, his hearing, smell, and touch gave him scraps with which to piece together a picture. There was, however, very little to hear but for a faint electrical hum and what might have been slow, deep breathing that was just his own. The air around him smelt clinical, sterile, almost but not quite familiar. He was laying upon something soft with something softer still supporting his head, and some kind of fabric was covering from the shoulders down.

He allowed his eyes to open very slowly; this proved to be a wise choice as he was soon dazzled by even the relatively dim illumination from the ceiling above him. He blinked a couple of times, turning his head gradually from side to side to take in his surroundings. He was, unmistakably, in a hospital ward which was very similar to one he felt certain he had inhabited before but couldn't quite place the memory. He was laying on a bed, a sheet spread over him and tucked under the mattress, and his head was resting upon a single pillow. In the bed opposite, still apparently unconscious, was the bulky figure of a familiar krogan.

Confused, Garrus extracted his hands from beneath the white expanse of linen to rub his face; as expected, his fingers found the rough bare skin around his right eye, but his left hand felt exactly the same on the other side. He sat up slightly, looking around with a little more urgency, dearly hoping to catch sight of his visor in close proximity.

"Ah. Welcome back, Garrus."

His head snapped around to face the speaker: a fellow turian was standing in the doorway, flanked by Commander Shepard. The moment he saw them both, the memories of the previous days rushed back into his mind in a great flood, a tidal wave of curiosity, bafflement, fear, and...

"Oh no..." he whimpered, at last remembering how and why he came to be where he was.

Shepard walked slowly closer, Garrus watching him with apprehension as he sat down on the edge of his bed. The set a familiar blue-tinted object down on his covered chest, though this only eased Garrus' anxiety fractionally.

"I think we're going to need a little talk."