



# ENEZIAN SONATA



A HALO WAYPOINT CHRONICLE

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## HISTORIAN'S NOTE

Halo: *Venezian Sonata* is set on September 22, 2559, approximately two-and-a-half months prior to the UNSC Infinity's assault on Zeta Halo.

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<\ UNCS OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE  
<\ CLASSIFIED TRANSMISSION [ONI.SEC.PRTCL-1A]  
>> SENT: [MONEYBAGS]  
<< RECEIVED: [73998-38490-VD]  
<\ VTT TRANSCRIPT AS FOLLOWS ~

>> I have a lead you may be interested in pursuing.

<< I'm listening.

>> You have been curious about the emergence of certain rogue elements on Sqala.

<< Location?

>> A tower. New. Owned by a power broker in New Tyne. It is still under construction, but operational—you will not miss it.

<< Noted.

>> It would be wise to impress upon your Captain Lasky that time is limited to seize this opportunity, and that your singular absence will not imperil the upcoming operation on Sovolanu.

<< Zef, someday we're going to have a friendly conversation about how you seem to know so much that you shouldn't.

>> Until that day, let us continue to enjoy this mutually beneficial partnership. I am sure that you will find this to be a most productive excursion. My contact will get you to the tower's visitor area, the rest will be up to you.

~ COMMUNICATION ENDS \>

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UNSC *INFINITY*, RECORD MATRIX LOGGED BY RLD 0205-4  
CONVERSATION BETWEEN [92458-37017-EB] AND [73998-38490-VD]  
September 22, 2559 / 1300 Hours

VD: "There's a mission..."

EB: "Say no more, I'll round up the rest of the squad."

VD: "A *solo* mission, Buck. I'm going in alone."

EB: "You're gonna need back-up. You're going to Venezia, Veronica. You do not go to a place like that without back-up—place has got a very unlvely rep!"

VD: "It's recon only. I'll be gone for the day at most."

EB: "Yeah, unless you get captured 'cos you didn't bring any backup. C'mon Veronica, lemme tag along just in case."

VD: "Sorry Buck, you know how it is."

EB: "Orders are orders."

VD: "Exactly. And I know you're one to... *misbehave*, so I'm giving you an order. You are not to deploy to Venezia and interfere with this operation."

EB: "You... Alright."

VD: "Thank you."

*[RLD NOTE: 87% probability that EB's sudden compliance with VD's order is not entirely honest.]*

VD: "I'll be back before you know it."

*[RLD NOTE: VD kisses EB and departs, preparing to deploy.]*

EB: "Every problem is an opportunity in disguise..."

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**VERONICA DARE**  
**New Tyne, Venezia**  
**September 22, 2559 / 2100 Hours**

Veronica Dare hated heights.

It was perhaps an ironic phobia for her to possess as an Office of Naval Intelligence agent who spent most of her time deploying alongside



Orbital Drop Shock Troopers and Spartans in coffin-like pods, but shimmying across a narrow ledge on a skyscraper over two-thousand feet high had a way of provoking such primal fears.

All the same, she couldn't deny the view—even through the torrential rain. New Tyne was a bustling metropolis not entirely dissimilar to the mainland region of New Mombasa back on Earth, or Noctus on Andesia. It was effectively the “capital city” of Venezia, an independent colony that was populated not only by humans, but Sangheili, Jiralhanae, Kig-Yar, and other former client species of the Covenant that could be found in office buildings, transportation networks, entertainment districts, factories, and spaceports.

By some miracle, the city *wasn't* a constant war zone. Veronica supposed that they all largely had one thing in common: they hated the UNSC.

The humans who had originally settled Venezia cut themselves off from the Unified Earth Government many years ago, and now the colonial militia that kept order had pledged themselves to the Keepers of the One Freedom—a Covenant remnant group. Every group here had a lot of fingers in a lot of pies, as the Keepers had recently pledged *their* allegiance to the Banished, so the trickle-down nature of relationships between species and factions meant that the line of “friend” and “foe” in this place was more of a complex web that nobody wanted to get tangled within. And so, life simply carried on.

It came as another slice of irony that, of all the places in the galaxy, Cortana's presence was minimal here. The strange “peace” on Venezia had preceded her Created regime by years, so she had devoted her resources elsewhere. But that meant the Venetian power brokers now felt emboldened to start pushing their luck, dialing up their criminal operations in increasingly brazen ways—and while Cortana might not be stepping in, their actions had drawn the attention of ONI's ever-watchful eye.

Dare had met with Zef 'Trahl's contact with little issue, a rather eccentric and aged Kig-Yar named Ke'jah. His colony-wide transport business had been the perfect cover for the set-up.

While travelling aboard a Ren shuttlecraft that once ferried Covenant ministers around their holy city, Dare had picked out the tower immediately from the vehicle's viewport. The appearance of the tower itself looked analogous to a *Halberd*-class destroyer rotated vertically. This kind of shared architectural design between buildings and starships was not uncommon, as it had phased in and out of style many times since humanity's early interstellar colonial era in the twenty-fourth century.

For his part, Ke'jah had taken the place of a vehicle bound to pick up a group of the tower's construction workers at the end of their shift and made a scene at the entrance desk to get paid extra for the mix-up. The commotion had allowed Dare to slip out from the vehicle and utilize a wrist-mounted grappleshot to reach the building's upper levels.

Dare made her way up to a level where construction was still ongoing. The tower split off into two sections and the building's bare structural skeleton continued up into the dark grey clouds and disappeared from view. The rain was coming down hard and thunder was rolling through the sky, sounding more like it was coming from *around* rather than above her. Dare was grateful for her helmet's VISR system which outlined the structures within a radius of several dozen meters, enough to make her feel a little safer on the more immediate terrain of scaffolding and haphazardly placed boards connecting across super rungs.

Air traffic appeared to be minimal, but Dare spotted a Phantom dropship circling around the local cluster of skyscrapers. She had no idea whether it was a security vessel or just a passing transport, but she felt fairly certain she hadn't been spotted—though the telltale whine of its engine was a little too close for comfort.

Descending a few levels of scaffolding, Dare tracked a series of cylindrical shafts until she found a small opening, then settled into a position that she determined would conceal her. She tapped a few commands on her wrist-mounted AN/PED-560 Vedette drone controller, and the device detached to hover slightly above her head. This model had originally entered service as an enhanced rangefinder and target designator, but its small profile made it a perfect candidate for modification into a surveillance drone for use in hostile territory.

The name was a bit of a mouthful though, so Dare had simply named the device “Eddie.”

She ran a few quick movement checks to ensure there was minimal input-response delay, then sent Eddie into the shaft opening.

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Callie Calder was just fifteen years old.

Her family lived on the rural plains at the farthest outskirts of New Tyne, which meant that she had a long commute to the education center every day—a half-hour trek to the maglev train station followed by another half-hour to get to the city. She had just spent the summer helping with grueling manual chores on the family farm before getting ready for a new school year, as her father had been unexplainably absent in recent months, while her mother seemed increasingly solemn and withdrawn. She could tell, in the way children can always tell with their parents, that something was wrong.

But things had taken a rather sharp turn just two days ago.

While on her way to the city, the maglev train had just... stopped.

*“This is the driver speaking,”* the voice came over the intercom. *“We’re*

*being held at a stop light for now, but expect we should be underway again soon. We apologize for the inconvenience.*”

Her first day back to school and she was going to be late.

Staring absently outside, Errant Vee’s *Amorphous* blasting in her ears, Callie was only vaguely aware of the group of Venezian militia who boarded the train and started checking the IDs of the younger passengers.

It wasn’t until she handed over her identification that she had any notion something was wrong. She was certain she had misheard when the guardsman said, “*We need you to come with us.*”

Confused, angry, and subject to many uncomfortable sideways glances from other passengers, Callie followed along in a daze—she hadn’t even noticed that her old-fashioned headphones had fallen off at some point. It wasn’t long after she and half a dozen others had been removed from the train that a black bag was put over her head, and the world fell instantly, awfully, silent.

She’d grown up in the latter years of the Covenant War, told about all the awful things the alien alliance had done, but it was what humans were capable of doing to each other that made her skin crawl more than anything else.

Callie awakened in a cell some time later.

It was a meager space with only a bed, toilet, and sink to speak of, though she had determined from the lack of muck and grime that it was built relatively recently. She had received no visitors, had been given no opportunity to call anyone. There was only a tray of food and a glass of water at one point when she had awakened.

Staring at the steel cup, she felt herself drowning in an ocean of dire considerations.

Her family had no idea what had happened to her—she'd left and simply not come back. Surely there must've been surveillance footage aboard the maglev, as well as numerous witnesses...

Callie's thoughts were interrupted as the lock on her cell door clicked and swung open. She had expected to see a militia guardsman, but the figure she was met with was covered in armor from head to toe. Their face was hidden behind a thick, curved helmet.

“Move along, recruit,” a deep voice barked. “Fall in line!”

Tentatively, Callie walked out of her cell and saw that dozens of others—some older, some younger—were being directed down a corridor. She followed suit.

To her surprise, as they reached a set of double doors at the end of the corridor, they were led into what looked like a corporate amphitheater. Rows of semi-circular seats of polished wood surrounded a round dais where an alien figure Callie didn't recognize stood. At first glance she might have mistaken it for a human being, clad as it was in the uniform of a courier with a mustard-colored tunic, until she saw its face bore two pairs of slit-like nostrils and what appeared to be gill-like organs underneath its jaw.

Callie swept her gaze across the room. The windows were tinted, covering the view outside, and armed guards were stationed around the perimeter.

Whatever was about to happen, there was no way out.

“You are here,” the alien spoke and its rasping, cold voice echoed through the amphitheater, “because your families owe debts that they cannot pay. *You* are their insurance policy.”

Everybody in the room was silent and sat perfectly still.



“You will be trained, and you will be forged into weapons to be wielded by many masters. You will serve until your family’s debt is repaid. Each job you take, each contract you sign, will stipulate a percentage of your profits that will go towards repayment, and what that percentage is will depend upon your conduct within these halls. Successes is expected; transgressions and failures will accrue interest.”

Callie could barely process the information she was receiving. Her family had been in some kind of debt—and it was up to *her* to be taken away from her life to pay it off? What had her father been up to over the last few months that he had been absent?

Worse still, if this strange speaker was to be believed, she hadn’t been kidnapped and taken from her family. She had been given away...

“You will be given a tour of the facilities here, then escorted to the barracks to begin training with your taskmasters.” The alien gestured towards several of the armored guards who looked just like the one that had opened Callie’s cell. “From this day forth, the lives you knew are over. Until your contracts are complete and your debts are repaid in full, or you fall in battle, you belong to us.”

It felt as though she was lucid during some terrible nightmare, but she was distracted for a moment as her eye caught something at the far end of the amphitheater. A large pipe that ran along the ceiling had a small grate covering, and Callie could have sworn she had spotted something move within it. Light catching on a lens, perhaps, and she was certain she had heard a slight metallic rattle from within. Judging by the reaction of two of the guards who she saw speaking into their comm units to her left, they had caught it as well.

Whatever it was, it probably wasn’t of any help to her. The alien speaker had departed and murmurs were breaking out among the rest of the audience. Some sat in nervous silence, rocking back and forth in their seats, but others had the steely look of resolve in their eyes.

*Sink or swim, Callie...*

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Veronica Dare wasn't sure if she'd been made, and she wanted desperately to continue observing, but her gut was telling her that now was the time to bug out. A momentary glitch in Eddie's response time had caused the drone to drift and bump into the pipe wall. She began to climb back up the scaffolding to the unfinished roof.

There would be time to process this information, file an official threat assessment, and hopefully muster the resources to do something about this...

In the back of her mind, she knew that these kids would be left to fend for themselves for a long time. The UNSC's current operational priority was stopping Cortana. To that end, *Infinity* was just weeks away from enacting Operation: WOLFE—and that wasn't even taking into account what kind of response would even be possible for a situation like this. Showing up in force would ignite a full-scale war with Venezia, which was something threat analysts would not deem to be a worthwhile allocation of resources to save a few dozen kids.

Dare hated the ruthless calculus that determined what they could and couldn't do, and in the years to come they would undoubtedly have to deal with the consequences of their inaction.

But in the meantime, Dare had to prioritize exfiltration.

Running over to the edge of the building, she ignored the lurch in her stomach as she looked down. A series of landing platforms had been extended on multiple levels below, she could use her grappleshot to lower herself down until she found one with a vehicle—not one of her best plans, but it was all she--

“So good of you to join us, Captain Dare.”

Dare spun, withdrawing her Mk50 in a single seamless motion, aiming her weapon at the newcomer. A hood covered his head, and his rasping voice sounded much like the one who had spoken in the amphitheater, but due to Eddie’s position she had been unable to identify him.

“You speak with M’raad.” He lowered his hood to reveal a bald humanoid head, with sunken eyes, skin as pale as milk, and reddened layers of flesh running under his jaw up to his chin.

“So, the Yonhet are creeping out of the shadows.” Dare mused, her tone smooth and collected, knowing. She had been an ONI agent long enough to maintain her composure even under such taut conditions.

The Yonhet smiled, showing a row of sharp teeth. “The fracturing of the Covenant has provided opportunity for all, none moreso than for M’raad’s people. War between empires is vast and bloody, but war between numerous disparate factions all seeking to gain an edge over each other? That, Captain, is good business. What do you make of the merchandise?”

Dare’s VISR picked up movement, red outlines appeared around half-a-dozen guards moving into position with weapons ready. She was surrounded.

“You mean the *children* you’ve taken?”

“Come now, Captain. M’raad is certain that ONI knows better than to take issue with such a thing.”

It came as no surprise that the ugly rumors of the SPARTAN-II program had reached Venezia. Now it looked like something similar was playing out here—the youth of this world being forcibly conscripted into becoming mercenaries to pay off family debts.

But surely they didn’t have the means to *augment* these kids, did

they? The broader proliferation of the Spartan program with its latest incarnation had demystified some elements of how these super-soldiers were made, but no simple mercenary outfit could realistically recreate it.

“I’d be more concerned about what’s going to happen when word of this little business venture of yours gets back to the UNSC.”

The Yonhet laughed. “What is the UNSC today? You seem rather like the Covenant to me. Your resources have been carved up, your colonial pipelines decimated, your mighty flagship on the run across the stars. It is no wonder many of your military partners have been looking to expand their enterprise into private sectors, as you can no longer protect them. You must understand, Captain: Your masters are far more likely to financially invest in this project than expend resources attempting to shut it down.”

At that moment, Dare heard the telltale whine of a Phantom’s engine and turned to see the dropship rising up behind her, its searchlight illuminating the area.

“Welcome to the new galaxy, Captain.” M’raad said, raising his arms. “We would be glad to have you as a customer. But if you’re not interested in buying, perhaps an ONI agent will make for a rather profitable *guest*.”

The Phantom turned to its side and its troop bay doors lowered. In moments, she expected to be hauled inside as reinforcements arrived.

“*That’s quite a sales pitch,*” a familiar gruff voice sounded over the comm. Dare’s VISR picked up the unmistakably titanic figure of Dutch wielding a tri-barreled yeller. “*Whatd’ya think, honey?*”

“Y’know Dutch,” Gretchen disembarked from the Phantom with a VK78 in each hand and came to Dare’s side, “I don’t much like the look of this neighborhood. Or the local color for that matter.”

*“Copy that.”*

M’raad let out a low hiss at the sudden change in circumstances—he had numbers on his side, but going up against two heavily armed Spartans on an unfinished skyscraper’s rooftop had tipped the odds ever so slightly.

“Shiny ride, you two.” Dare began to slowly back up towards the Phantom while Gretchen kept her covered.

“Damn right she’s shiny!” Dutch kept his heavy machine gun aimed at M’raad. “You ready to leave these mike-foxtrots behind?”

They made it into the Phantom’s troop bay and Gretchen immediately marched to the cockpit. Dare couldn’t help but be surprised at the disciplined restraint of the Yonhet’s mercenaries, as she had expected that one of them would have opened fire.

“Another time,” M’raad called out. “We look forward to our next opportunity for a mutually beneficial transaction. Farewell, Captain.”

The Phantom’s troop bay doors closed and the dropship departed, darting away from the tower into thick layers of storm clouds to avoid detection or any gunships M’raad might send. Dare doubted that he would, however—perhaps the strangest thing about him was the apparent earnest confidence and certainty that the UNSC or ONI would look to make a deal with him somewhere down the line.

In the meantime, Dare had a small matter to attend to.

“What are you two doing here? I told-- no, *ordered* Buck, that he was not to involve himself in this operation.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Dutch said flatly. “He said that you did that.”



“So where is he?”

“He’s back home on *Infinity*, just as you ordered.”

“Thing is,” Gretchen entered the troop bay and pulled off her helmet, revealing a smirk, “and he was very keen to stress this part: ‘She didn’t say anything about *anybody* else on the squad gettin’ involved.’”

Dare closed her eyes for a second and sighed. “Of course.”

“And it looks like a good thing that we did,” Dutch attached his heavy machine gun to a rack on the rear wall of the dropship’s interior. “Or Captain Lasky might not have been too pleased about needing to launch a rescue op. Ma’am.”

It was a point she had to willingly concede. If they hadn’t shown up—if Buck hadn’t found some operational ambiguity in her orders—then things would have undoubtedly turned out very differently today.

“So, learn anything good at this little shindig?” Gretchen asked.

“Need-to-know, I’m afraid.”

“And will we?”

Dare remained silent for a moment.

Though she hated to admit it, M’raad had a point. What exactly was the UNSC right now—and ONI for that matter? Like the Covenant, their resources had been scattered across space, their seemingly glorious resurgence diminished from a triumphant roar to a strangled whisper.

“Mind taking the cockpit, you two?” Dare answered. “I need this report ready by the time we get back to *Infinity*.”

“Be my guest.” Gretchen made a slightly exaggerated show of waving Dutch through before following and sealing the door behind her, leaving Dare alone in the darkened troop bay.

“This is Captain Veronica Dare reporting on Operation: SONATA. Zef ‘Trahl’s intel was good, something big is going down here on Venezia. Preliminary observations showed several dozen children who have been given by their families to a Yonhet power broker where they will be trained to become mercenaries contracted to multiple unidentified groups. Surveillance footage and additional intel is attached to begin Section One review. File under code word ‘janissary.’”

Section One had run countless ever-expanding threat analysis models. Even in the event of actually managing to pull off stopping Cortana, the galaxy they would face afterwards would fill that vacuum with countless other problems. What Dare had discovered here today would be one of many, and she couldn’t begin to imagine how it would grow over the months and years to come.

*Janissary.*

The name had come from a group that had emerged from the latter years of humanity’s Middle Ages. The Ottoman Empire was known to have abducted children and—through years of intensive training—forged those slave-soldiers and mercenaries into a powerful military force.

ONI had once done the same and the results had ultimately helped them win the war against the Covenant. “Janissary” seemed an appropriate reminder that history had a habit of repeating itself, and this time it would be ONI on the receiving end.

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**OPTICAN, HEALTHCARE ON DEMAND!  
PRIVATE LOG // ADAM ANDREWS  
SEPTEMBER 29, 2559**

Where to even begin...

Actually, first of all, a reminder: Dan is cooking tonight, his own family Bolognese recipe. Make sure to pick up some parmesan on the way home.

Anyway, to business. Contact has been made with several parties on Venezia, one of whom seems particularly promising. Nor Fel assures me that her clearing house crew can get what I need, but warned that it will take some time. Until I hear back from her, we will continue attempting to stabilize the existing Waverly compounds. Supplies are running short, but we are so close to a breakthrough. I can feel it.

Received word that New Colonial Alliance raids have been stepping up throughout Outer Colony regions in recent months, they hit Cygnus just a few weeks ago, and apparently they're flying Banished colors now. All the more reason to do what we're doing. To keep traveling down this road.

The UNSC can't protect these people and Created intervention seems more akin to blindly tossing a grenade into a crowded room.

Super-soldiers can no longer remain the dominion of Spartans—of the UNSC. Our industries span numerous colonies, whole sectors of space, and they must be able to level the playing field on their own terms.

Where there is need, Optican will provide.