FOR NIC,
WHO ALWAYS TELLS THE BEST STORIES
AND STARTED THIS ONE
So here’s the file that almost killed me, Director.

I won’t bore you with the tally of databases plundered, light-years jumped, or cute, sniffing orphans created in its compilation—our fee already reflects Level Of Difficulty. But this dirt is out there, if you know where to look. Seems your cleanup crews weren’t quite as thorough as you’d like, and your little corporate war isn’t quite as secret as you’d hoped.

You’ll find all intel we could unearth concerning the Kerenza disaster compiled here in hard copy. Where possible, scans of original documentation are included. Fun Times commence with the destruction of the Kerenza colony (one year ago today) and proceed chronologically through events on battlecarrier Alexander and science vessel Hypatia as best as we can reconstruct them.

All visual and audio data are included in original form, along with written transcripts. All typographical and graphical anomalies are present in the original files. Commentary from my team is marked by paper clip icons. Some written materials were censored by the UTA and had to be reconstructed by our commtechs, though profanity remains censored as per your instruction. Sure, the story kicks off with the deaths of thousands of people, but god forbid there be cussing in it, right?

The Illuminae Group

_In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act._

—Orwell
Incept: 01/30/75

Interviewer: Tell me about yesterday.

Kady Grant: I was in class when it started. This is going to sound stupid, but I broke up with my boyfriend that morning, and he was right there on the other side of the room. I’m staring out the window and coming up with all the things I should say to the jerk, when these ships fly right overhead and all the windows start shaking.

Interviewer: Did you know something was up?

Kady Grant: No. You don’t jump straight to an invasion. The Kerenza settlement wasn’t exactly legal, but we still got traffic around the mine and refinery. I figured it was an ore carrier coming in too low and went back to plotting my idiot ex’s downfall.

Interviewer: When did you become aware of the invasion?

Kady Grant: That would be when all the sirens started screaming. Some bright spark who’s probably dead now
sounded the spaceport alarms. The Defiant—that was our WUC protection ship—had transmitted an alert to let us know unfriendly people with big guns had arrived, and—

Interviewer: How do you know the Defiant transmitted a warning?

Kady Grant: I’m good with computers. I wanted to know what was going on at the port, so I took a look.

Interviewer: You evacuated at that stage?

Kady Grant: You make it sound way more organized than it was.

Interviewer: How was it?

Kady Grant: All kittens and rainbows. Apart from the screaming and explosions.

Interviewer: How did you make it out?

Kady Grant: I’m a lateral thinker.

Interviewer: Meaning you used your comput—

Kady Grant: Meaning I broke open a window.

Interviewer: Oh.

Kady Grant: I had a truck in the parking lot. I borrowed my mom’s because I didn’t want to have to take the tube
home with him. Having the truck there saved my life. I saw one of my teachers in the lot, and this chunk of metal came screaming in from the sky, and . . .

**Interviewer:** Miss Grant?

**Kady Grant:** I had this moment when I thought I’d left the keys in my desk, and I pulled apart my bag and threw stuff everywhere—I guess I knew I wouldn’t need any of it again, isn’t that weird? But I found the keys at the bottom and jumped in, and just as I start the engine, I look across and he’s standing right there, staring at me. I swear—

**Interviewer:** Hold on, the survivor list is refreshing. What was the name you were after?

**Kady Grant:** Ezra Mason.

**Interviewer:** We have him. He’s on the Alexander.

**Kady Grant:** [Inaudible.]

**Interviewer:** Are you okay to continue, Mr. Mason?

**Ezra Mason:** I’m all right. My shoulder hurts.

**Interviewer:** I’ll have an orderly bring you some more meds. You were saying about your escape from the school?
**Ezra Mason:** Never seen anything like it. Just this crush of people and screaming. Teachers. Students. I mean, we knew each other. Colony that isolated, everyone pretty much knows everyone. But it was like they all just lost it. I remember getting pushed along in the mob and wondering why the hallway was soft under my boots. And then I realized what I was walking on.

**Interviewer:** So how did you get out?

**Ezra Mason:** I’m six-five. Played point defense on the school geeball team. One time I hit this receiver so hard they had to ID him with DNA.

**Interviewer:** Where did you go after the first missile strike?

**Ezra Mason:** Everyone was headed for the tube station, but I figured a tin can in an underground ice tunnel was the last place you’d want to be with bombs going off. So—

**Interviewer:** Wait, you people had a subway system? I thought this settlement was illegal?

**Ezra Mason:** Chum. the Kerenza mine operated undetected for twenty years. Whole families lived there. You know how far from the Core we are, right?

**Interviewer:** Maybe further than you might think . . .

**Ezra Mason:** . . . What the hell’s that supposed to mean?
Interviewer: Nothing. I’m sorry.

Interviewer: You were saying about the subway?

Ezra Mason: Yeah . . . Right. Basically I didn’t wanna risk it down there, so I lit out through the fire escape. Doubled back into the parking lot. Which might not have been the best plan, since I didn’t have wheels. And I’m looking around, and the sky is raining fire and I’m still freezing because the windchill on Kerenza could hit forty below on a bad day. And there she was.

Interviewer: Who?

Ezra Mason: My ex-girlfriend. Who’d dumped me maybe three hours before. So that was . . . awkward.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Ezra Mason: Well, I figured there was a good chance she’d just run me over if I stood in front of the truck. So I knocked on the window and said something like “Lovely day for a drive.” and at that point the southeastern anti-missile battery got vaporized by what I assume was a missile. So maybe you might wanna note in your report that those things don’t, you know, stop missiles.

Interviewer: So she let you in?

Ezra Mason: She let me in. I guess she figured she didn’t hate me enough to let me get X-ed out by a Bei-
Tech kill squad. She had to think about it for a minute, though.

Interviewer: How did you know BeiTech was behind the attack?

Ezra Mason: I think the biggest giveaway was the huge BeiTech logo on the warship hovering overhead. It'd dropped out of the clouds and was X-ing the rest of the defense silos by then.

Interviewer: By “warship,” you mean the BeiTech dreadnought Lincoln?

Ezra Mason: Yeah. That's them. Bastards. Wait, can I swear in this thing?

Interviewer: So what happened next?

Kady Grant: We took off outta the parking lot like we were in a chase scene. Some moron had parked blocking the exit, but the truck was all-terrain, so we rammed it.

Interviewer: What was it like outside the school?

Kady Grant: There were a lot of explosions and a lot of dead people. Dead civilians who worked for a mining company. I mean, imagine you’re an interstellar corporation, right? You discover an illegal mining op
run by one of your competitors. Do you (a) report it to the UTA and laugh as the fines roll in, or (b) jump in an attack fleet and X-out every man, woman, and child on the planet? What the hell was BeiTech thinking?

**Interviewer:** What you and I need to do is focus on what happened on Kerenza. Gathering intel on the attack is the best thing we can do to help right now.

**Kady Grant:** I can’t believe this.

**Interviewer:** Miss Grant—

**Kady Grant:** Okay. Fine. We took the main arterial, and Ezra turned on the radio. For a second I thought the idiot was looking for the right soundtrack or something, but there was an emergency broadcast up. They were telling us to get to the spaceport, and our research fleet was going to send down shuttles to ferry us all up to orbit.

**Interviewer:** So you turned for the spaceport?

**Ezra Mason:** Yeah. I turned on the radio to maybe find us some getaway music, but there was an emergency broadcast telling everyone to hit the port for evacuation. So that’s what we tried to do. But there were cars everywhere, and some truck had overturned on the strip. Kady nearly flipped us, and when I offered to drive, she . . . well, she called me a very bad word.
Interviewer: I see.

Ezra Mason: I can repeat it if you want, but—

Interviewer: That’s fine, Mr. Mason.

Ezra Mason: Mr. Mason is my dad. And you still won’t tell me why I can’t see him.

Interviewer: We need you properly debriefed before you have any civilian contact, Mr. Mason. I mean . . . Ezra.

Ezra Mason: “Civilian contact.” Wow. He’s my father, chum. You guys still have fathers, right? Or does everyone in the great United Terran Authority get grown in a vat nowadays?

Interviewer: Why don’t you just tell me what happened next.

Ezra Mason: BeiTech blew the spaceport, that’s what happened next. Popped a half-dozen missiles and turned it into a smoking hole in the ice. I played geeball with one of the ground crew guys. Rob Flynn. Burton, our next-door neighbor, he worked the quarantine bays. There was this girl, Jodie Kingston. I knew her since eighth grade. She worked the port comms rig. She was . . .

Interviewer: Ezra?

Ezra Mason: Wow. I just realized. She was the first girl I ever kissed . . .
Interviewer: Do you need a minute?

Kady Grant: No. I need to get this done. Once the spaceport was gone, it was hard to know where to head. Mostly we were just dodging explosions. The ground was shaking, and at first I thought it was the missiles hitting. Then I realized the impacts were cracking the ice shelf under the colony’s foundations.

Interviewer: Do you have a background in geology?

Kady Grant: I’m seventeen—of course I don’t. But there were these huge cracks opening up in the ground, big enough to lose a car down. And before you ask how I know that, I saw it happen. There were kids in the back.

Interviewer: So you were driving through the city, and what happened next?

Kady Grant: Ezra wanted to find his father. He worked at the refinery, but I told him we couldn’t get through the crowd that’d be streaming out of there. His dad’s a big guy, like Ez. I told him they’d all be evacuating together, and we had to trust him to keep his feet. If we went in there, someone might have jacked the truck, and then we’d be screwed. I saw a woman pull this guy off a quad bike and take off on it with her kid. I saw a security officer shoot a guy trying to climb into the back of his truck. We weren’t going to make it as far as the refinery. I wanted to go for my mom instead, and my cousin Asha. My dad was offworld—he works rotation on Jump Station Heimdall—so it was just Mom and me. She’s a pathologist, so she did research, worked at the med center. Asha was training there.
Interviewer: Do you need me to look up your mother’s name on the lists?

Kady Grant: No, she made it out. She’s here on the Hypatia. I saw her before my interview.

Interviewer: And your cousin?

Kady Grant: No. She didn’t.

Interviewer: I’m sorry.

Kady Grant: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, did Ezra see reason? Did you go to find your mother?

Kady Grant: We started. Ezra’s mom isn’t around, so mine had just spent a year feeding him. I think she was more upset about the breakup than anyone. We were heading for her lab, and by that time there were people in the streets, riding in all-terrains, some on quad bikes, folks on foot. The ground was cracking and there were chunks breaking off buildings, and all the time there’s this huge BeiTech ship in the sky, pounding our defenses with missiles. Shuttles were lifting off with civis evacuating. It was so loud I thought my ears were bleeding. And over the top of all that, Ezra chooses then to start criticizing my driving.

Interviewer: It’s hard to believe you guys broke up.

Kady Grant: You have no idea. Anyway, that was when half the cineplex fell on our truck.
Interviewer: . . . Wait, what?

**Ezra Mason:** I don’t know how long I was unconscious for. I came to and thought the sky was covered in spiderwebs. And then I realize I’m looking through the smashed wind-shield and we’re buried under half a building. The truck is scrapped. Kady’s next to me and there’s blood all over her face, and I couldn’t find a pulse. So I dragged her out of the wreckage and started to give her mouth-to-mouth and that’s when she slugged me. Your Honor.

Interviewer: She hit you?

**Ezra Mason:** Yeah, right in the face. Good shot, too. I dunno. She thought I was trying to kiss her. She’d hit her head, she was messed up. So we’re gearing up to start yelling at each other, and then we realize the sky is full of Cyclone fighter ships. So I figured the cavalry must have arrived.

Interviewer: Could you still see the Lincoln?

**Ezra Mason:** No. But we could see that the refinery had been hit. It was covered in this . . . I dunno. It’s hard to describe. It was like a mist? But it was black. Creeping in the air real slow, like molasses. Not smoke. It was . . . something different.

Interviewer: You said your father worked at the refinery?

**Ezra Mason:** Yeah. So of course I want to go look for him. And Kady still wants to go find Mrs. Grant. And the glacier is cracking open and the sky is on fire, and I
think I can see BeiTech ground troops in the distance.
And then I said it.

Interviewer: What did he say?

Kady Grant: He said, “You picked a hell of a day to dump me, Kades.”

Interviewer: . . . You honestly said that?

Ezra Mason: Yeah. So all hell breaks loose, and Kady is yelling at me and I’m yelling back. All this stuff that’d been building up for the last year and boiling just under the skin. Like, I loved her. I love her. But she had this way of just . . . It was so stupid. The world is ending all around us and we’re screaming about college applications and commitment and shit. I mean, can you believe that?

Interviewer: You’re seventeen, right?

Ezra Mason: Almost eighteen.

Interviewer: Then yes, I believe it.

Ezra Mason: Cold, chum. Real cold.

Interviewer: So what happened next?
Ezra Mason: I took off. She told me I was being crazy, but I was just . . . furious. And my dad is all I have left, so . . . yeah. Ran toward the refinery, burning cars and trashed buildings everywhere. I saw a Cyclone crash into an apartment block right in front of my face. Felt the heat on my skin. I was just keeping low and trying to get closer to the plant, but there were BT troops all over. Big, armor-plated goons in winter camo carrying guns you could kill a glaciosaur with. I didn’t really have a plan. I just needed to find my dad. Didn’t know what I was going to do once I hit that fog. But turned out that wouldn’t be a problem.

Interviewer: Why’s that?

Ezra Mason: Well, they shot me.

Interviewer: They shot him?

Kady Grant: I couldn’t believe it either. Those should have got in line. They’re not the ones who had to put up with his—

Interviewer: You said you’d parted ways at that stage. How did you find out he’d been shot?

Kady Grant: I started by heading toward my mom’s lab on foot, but there were a bunch of BeiTech troops in the way. They were putting carriers down on the ground and rolling out soldiers and all-terrain vehicles.
I was a little concussed. I'm pretty sure. I know I stopped to puke at one point. I could see shuttles landing out by the labs to do evac, so I just hoped my mom was getting on one of them. I knew I wasn’t going to make it across town to her. I wasn’t going to make it anywhere without another truck. So I stole one from a BeiTech crew.

**Interviewer:** I’m sorry, you what?

**Kady Grant:** I am frequently underestimated. I think it’s because I’m short.

**Interviewer:** They didn’t want it back?

**Kady Grant:** Probably. They were pretty busy jumping out of the way. Also, I knew my way around the middle of town—they didn’t. I took some sharp corners around the back of the community complex, scraped the truck doors right off. But when I got out the other end, I’d lost them. Our people didn’t have weapons to shoot at me with, and theirs thought I was on the same team, I guess.

**Interviewer:** What happened next?

**Kady Grant:** There was this filthy black cloud oozing down from atmo toward the refinery, and I knew that was where Ezra was. I heard it was some kind of bio-attack. Is that true?

**Interviewer:** I don’t know. You said he was shot. so I guess you found him?
Kady Grant: On the wrong end of a BeiTech platoon, bleeding everywhere. I kind of freaked out when I saw it all.

Interviewer: Were you able to retrieve him?

Kady Grant: I, uh . . . Are there likely to be any prosecutions for stuff that happened down there?

Interviewer: They X-ed out a quarter of my crew. None of us are going to weep if you're telling me you took out a BeiTech squad to get to him.

Kady Grant: Like I said, I'm pretty small, and there was a lot of blood all over everything. I guess my foot slipped on the accelerator. It was hard to reach, you know? I ran a bunch of them down and pulled up right beside him.

Interviewer: What did he do?

Kady Grant: He said, “Hey, Kades.” What a catch, seriously. The truck's door was missing, though, so it was easy for him to climb in, and we took off like we were outrunning a blizzard. We could see shuttles coming down on the outskirts of town, and they didn't have BeiTech markings on them, so we risked it. We were hoping they were evac sent by our research fleet.

Interviewer: And then what?

Ezra Mason: I don't remember much. I think I made a
joke about needing to see her license and registration. Because, you know, she just ran over a bunch of—

**Interviewer:** I get it.

**Ezra Mason:** Right. And then I said, “I’m bleeding.” and she said, “Shut up, I’m not talking to you,” so I just kinda concentrated on not dying. There was blood everywhere. It hurt so much I think I started laughing. Maybe I was going into shock. Kady was yelling at me to put pressure on it, but it hurt less if I didn’t. There were fighters overhead. I remember being really cold. I remember looking at Kady driving, covered in blood, with her hair crusted with snow and everything. I think I told her she was beautiful. Then the lights went out.

**Interviewer:** You made it to the shuttles?

**Kady Grant:** We made it close. We were driving a BeiTech truck now, so I had to stop and drag Ezra across the ice so they could see we were civis. A couple of the med center staff had made it out there, so they were putting the wounded on shuttles with those guys, and the rest of us into the others. I was screaming my head off, trying to get someone to help me lift him in. I don’t even know how I dragged him. The whole time there were these missiles arcing in and exploding around us, fires starting. I guess they decided if I could yell that loud, I wasn’t hurt bad enough to make the wounded
shuttle, so they made me leave him with the doc. That’s how he ended up on the Alexander and I ended up on the Hypatia.

**Interviewer:** You’ve been very helpful. Did you see whether any missiles hit the refinery?

**Kady Grant:** I don’t think so, just the black cloud. They wouldn’t blow it up, though, would they? I mean, if BeiTech wanted the colony gone, they’d have just ratted to the UTA about it. They obviously wanted the hermium we were mining for themselves. They’d hardly destroy the only way they had to process it.

**Interviewer:** We can’t speculate yet on what their aim was.

**Kady Grant:** I guess if they catch up with us, we can ask them before they blow us to pieces.

**Interviewer:** There’s just one last thing, Mr. Mason.

**Ezra Mason:** Can this thing please include those pain meds you promised?

**Interviewer:** We’ve had another update to the casualty lists. I’m afraid I have some news about your father.