



Mass Effect: Deception

By William C. Dietz

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An all-new adventure inspired by the award-winning videogame from BioWare!

The universe is under siege. Every fifty thousand years, a race of sentient machines invades our galaxy to harvest all organic life-forms. They are the Reapers.

Two people who know the truth are desperately searching for a way to stop the cycle: Navy admiral David Anderson and his partner, Kahlee Sanders. They have uncovered grisly evidence proving that the Reaper threat is real. But in so doing they have exposed the machinations of Cerberus, a secretive paramilitary organization, and its mysterious leader, the Illusive Man—putting David and Kahlee in mortal danger, for Cerberus will stop at nothing to protect its secrets.

But along the way, they find an unlikely ally in Gillian Grayson, a young woman with extraordinary powers. Once the subject of horrifying scientific experiments, Gillian is now free—and beginning to master her deadly abilities. But after learning that Cerberus was responsible for the death of her father, Gillian swears vengeance against the group and the Illusive Man—threatening to unravel everything Kahlee and David are fighting for.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

William C. Dietz is the bestselling author of *Resistance: The Gathering Storm*, *HALO: The Flood*, and *Hitman: Enemy Within*, plus thirty other science fiction novels, some of which have been translated into German, Russian, and Japanese. He grew up in the Seattle area, served as a medic with the navy and the Marine Corps, and graduated from the University of Washington. Dietz worked as a surgical technician, news writer, college instructor, television producer, and director of public relations for an international telephone company prior to embarking on a full-time writing career.

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one The Citadel “I don’t want to go,” Nick said stubbornly. “Why can’t I stay here?”

David Anderson didn’t have any children of his own, and had the matter been left to him, the ex-navy officer would have ordered the teenager out of the apartment with possibly unpleasant results. Fortunately, the woman he loved knew how to deal with such situations. Kahlee was in good shape for a woman in her forties, or thirties for that matter. As she smiled tiny creases appeared around her eyes. “You can’t stay here because David and I may want you to tell the Council what happened on the day Grayson invaded the Grissom Academy. It’s important to make sure that nothing like that ever happens again.”

Nick had been shot in the stomach during the attack and sent to the Citadel for advanced medical treatment. So he knew about Grayson firsthand. Nick, with shoulder-length black hair and a relatively small frame for a boy his age, looked hopeful. “Can I go to The Cube on the way back?”

“Sure,” Kahlee replied. “But only for an hour. Come on—let’s go.”

A crisis had been averted, and Anderson was grateful. As they left the apartment the door locked behind them. An elevator took them down to the first floor and out into the hectic crush of the lower wards. A monorail loomed overhead, the pedways were crowded with individuals of every species, and the streets were jammed with ground vehicles. All of which was normal for the huge star-shaped space station that served as the cultural, financial, and political hub of the galaxy.

Anderson had been an admiral, and the Alliance’s representative to the Citadel Council, so he had spent a lot of time aboard the habitat. Everything was organized around a central ring. It was ten kilometers across, and the Citadel’s forty-kilometer-long “fingers” pointed from it to the stars beyond. The total population of the station was said to be in excess of thirteen million sentients, none of whom had played a role in creating the complex structure.

The asari had discovered the station 2,700 years earlier while exploring the vast network of mass relays put in place by a space-faring species known as the protheans. Having established a base on the Citadel, the asari learned how to create mass effect fields, and made use of them to explore the galaxy.

When the salarians found the space station a few decades later the two races agreed to form the Citadel Council for the purpose of settling disputes. And as more species began to travel the stars, they had little choice but to follow the dictates of the technologically advanced Council races. Humans were relative newcomers and had only recently been granted a seat on the Citadel Council.

For many years it had been assumed that the protheans were responsible for creating the Citadel. But more recently it had been learned that the real architects were a mysterious race of sentient star-ships called the Reapers who conceived of the space station as a trap, and were responsible for annihilating all organic sentients every fifty thousand years or so. And, even though Reapers were trapped in dark space, there was evidence that they could reach out and control their servants from light-years away. And that, Anderson believed, was a continuing threat. One the Council should deal with immediately.

The problem being that day-to-day interspecies rivalries often got in the way of the big picture. That was just one of the reasons why it had been so difficult for Anderson and Kahlee to get the Council to look beyond historical grievances to the greater threat represented by the Reapers. Anderson and Kahlee were certain that the Reapers had been in at least partial control of Grayson when he invaded the Grissom Academy, but they were still struggling to convince certain members of the Council. And that had everything to do with the presentation they planned to give. Hopefully, if they were successful, the Council would agree to unify behind an effort to counter the danger that threatened them all. Otherwise the Reapers would do what they had done before—wipe the galaxy clean of sentient life.

As Anderson led the others aboard a public shuttle he was reminded of the fact that the Reapers had created the Citadel as bait for a high-tech trap. One that had been sprung so successfully that now, two years later, some of the damage the sentient machines had caused was still being repaired.

The vehicle came to life as Anderson settled himself behind the controls. The contragravity speeder was powered by a mass effect field and would carry them from the lower wards to the vicinity of the Presidium where the Council's offices were located. Kahlee was sitting next to him and Nick was in the back, fiddling with his omni-tool. The device consisted of an orange hologram that was superimposed over the teenager's right arm. It could be used for hacking computers, repairing electronic devices, and playing games. And that's what Nick was doing as Anderson guided the shuttle through a maze of streets, under graceful pedways, and into the flow of traffic that ran like a river between a pair of high-rise cliffs.

Ten minutes later the shuttle pulled into a rapid-transit platform where they disembarked. A short, tubby volus pushed his way forward to claim the speedster for himself. He was dressed in an environment suit and most of his face was hidden by a breathing mask. "Make way Earth people—I don't have all day."

They were accustomed to the often rude manner in which the Citadel's citizens interacted with each other and weren't surprised by the stranger's contentious tone. The volus were closely allied with the raptorlike turians—many of whom still felt a degree of animosity toward humans resulting from the First Contact War. And that was just one of the problems which prevented the races from trusting each other.

As Anderson, Kahlee, and Nick walked toward a bank of elevators they passed a pair of beautiful asari. The species were asexual, but to Anderson's eye they looked like human females, even if their skin had a bluish tint. Rather than hair, waves of sculpted skin could be seen on the backs of their heads and they were very shapely. "You can put your eyeballs back in your head now," Kahlee commented as they entered the elevator. "No wonder the asari get along without men. Maybe I could too."

Anderson grinned. "Just looking, that's all. I'm partial to blondes."

Kahlee made a face as the elevator started upward and the salarian standing in front of them lost his briefcase. It had been tucked under his arm but suddenly slipped out and landed on the floor. Like all of his kind the salarian's head was narrow and crowned with two hornlike appendages. As he bent to retrieve the object it scooted away from him.

“Nick!” Kahlee said crossly. “Stop that . . . Give him the case and apologize.”

The teen looked as if he might object, saw the expression on Kahlee’s face, and apparently thought better of it. Having removed the folder from the floor, he gave it back to its owner and mumbled, “Sorry.”

The salarian had seen biotic pranks before and wasn’t amused. “You have a talent,” he snapped. “Use it wisely.”

Nick was one of the rare individuals who could manipulate the gravity-like force found in all of the otherwise empty spaces in the universe. The boy had been working to refine his biotic skills of late and the subtle combination of energies required to dislodge the briefcase and then move it around was quite impressive. It was also annoying and made Anderson frown. Fortunately for Nick, Kahlee was more patient. Maybe too patient.

The elevator doors opened smoothly and the passengers spilled out into a lobby that opened onto the Presidium. In marked contrast to the densely packed wards it was almost entirely open. There were artificial clouds in the blue sky, sunlight streamed down from above, and, as Anderson accompanied the others out onto a curving walkway, he could feel a light breeze touch his neck. The parklike area was home to a lake, clusters of trees, and a large expanse of well-manicured grass. People representing various races were constantly coming and going. Some appeared to be in a hurry while others strolled along or sat on benches.

Anderson’s pace was more purposeful as he led the others toward the Citadel Tower, located at the very center of the massive space station. It was difficult to appreciate the structure by looking straight up at it, but Anderson knew it could be seen from many kilometers away, and was the most important landmark on the Citadel.

The Council Chambers were positioned toward the top of the spire and it wouldn’t pay to be late, so Anderson set a brisk pace. The Council’s agenda typically remained in flux right up until the beginning of each meeting. So Anderson had no way to know if their presentation would be first, last, or somewhere in between.

But before the threesome could enter the tower it was necessary to check in with the Citadel Security Services (C-Sec) kiosk located outside the main entrance. The person in charge was turian. Bright eyes stared at Anderson from bony sockets that were surrounded by a tracery of scarlet tattoos. A flat, thin-slitted nose was flanked by hard facial plates. The officer’s mouth formed an inverted V and wasn’t designed to smile. “Yes, sir . . . What can I do for you?”

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