



The Hammer Cup 2017

Short Story Event

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Finishing Half-Life is just the beginning!

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Introduction

This is the third short story event I have run and I wished I had run more. In fact, from now on this will be at least a yearly event, maybe more. One for the main mapping challenges and others for various occasions.

This short story event was run for the Hammer Cup 2017, it ran from 19th November until 31st December.

Stories had to use one of the entered maps as its setting or one of the first four themes; Defend, Bridge, Toxic and Teleport.

The word limit was 2,500 and there was no prize; this was an event not a competition.

Thanks to the authors for taking the time to write their stories. I hope you enjoy them.

Phillip - 2nd January 2018

The Gnome by Gnom3d

"Still woozy after the train derailment, you and your companion arrive at a communications outpost - a welcome checkpoint on what's sure to be a long and wearisome journey. Inside, she gets to work establishing comms, while you scope out supplies. You look around but find nothing except old takeout boxes and empty beer bottles. There's something large and cumbersome-looking underneath the table. You reach down to pull out the crudely painted object, its broken top section rough and stony to the touch, as you bring it into view.

That expression. Was it...mocking you?

And yet, you can't look away. Despite the chipped paint and grotesque overhanging gut, you find yourself captivated by what it represents. Its cheerful smile frozen in time...a time before the Black Mesa incident. Before the Combine. Here, amidst all this decay and ruin, this broken, battered lawn ornament was a precious relic; a stark reminder of the innocence humanity had lost, and what you were fighting for.

Stolen Research by 1upD

Based on a TeleportVille Map

The sun rose on a desolate landscape. The cracked and winding road through the mountains had been seldom used by human beings for almost a decade. A solitary decaying gas station stood as a lone sentinel, waiting for travelers who would never arrive. Cars remained parked outside, stripped for parts by scavengers years ago and left to rust in the open.

Besides the gas station there was one other lonely abandoned building. At one point it was probably an industrial office space. Like everything else, today it was a solemn derelict. At least that's how it appeared on the outside.

"Rise and shine, Shaun."

The voice belonged to a figure emerged from the front of the building, clutching a shotgun and clad in tattered clothing.

"About time. Did you sleep in again, Leo?"

Shaun was well hidden in the corner of the building, especially for such a large man. He had a pistol and enough ammunition to hunt for a year. Shaun was the night watch for the band of eight rebels operating out of the old industrial building. He rotated shifts with Leo and two other guards, Matthew and Martha.

Leo knew full well that he had rigged enough laser tripwires to know if an antlion sneezed within a mile of their location, but it helped the others sleep better to have someone watching over them. Of course, he wouldn't tell Shaun that.

On the way into the hideout, Shaun passed two boarded up doors. There was only one way into their laboratory, and the most accessible doors had been barred to save them time if an intruder tried to enter.

In the room on his left, two young women were furiously scratching at a notepad. Their voices were muffled by the reinforced glass, but he could hear that they were raising their voices at each other.

At it again.

The two were the youngest members of their science team, and they always found a way to get on each others' nerves.

Entering the atrium, Shaun was confronted by a massive apparatus filling most of the industrial space. Seeing the teleporter every day, he had lost his sense of admiration and wonder for it. Shaun continued to walk towards the storage room where he kept his ammo when he didn't need it. He passed Dr. Corey and Dr. Kowalski, both looking at a console. They were the lead scientists and the only ones old enough to have completed formal education before the Combine ended their civilization. The two Doctors had brought Autumn and Heather up to speed on math and physics, incorporating them into their research.

Hearing the argument coming from the small office space, the doctors looked up from the console, glanced at each other, and headed that way.

"You can't be serious. We'd have to rewrite all our software from scratch!"

Heather was level-headed and by the books. Her patient attitude was probably owed to her humility regarding the science they used. Having learned everything she knew from Dr. Corey, she wasn't one to rock the boat.

"In order to apply what we've learned from our last test, we have to rewrite the code anyway. It will be better this time."

Having studied higher math before Dr. Kowalski took her under his wing, Autumn was much more confident. She criticized everything they did, constantly pushing them to work harder.

Dr. Kowalski had an imposing presence. Both of the younger scientists turned to face him as soon as he entered the room. He picked up Autumn's notebook and looked over the new equations briefly, stroking his beard with concentration.

"I think we should try this."

...

The metal gates closed grimly over the teleporter platform, sealing an intrepid adventurer inside. The faded old garden gnome sat awaiting its journey. The platform slowly rose above the floor, squealing on poorly oiled wheels towards the second story.

Finally, the teleporter platform snapped into place with a metallic clack. The gnome disappeared in a flash of light. A clap of thunder reverberated through the building.

After a few seconds of celebration, Heather spoke up first. "How do we know if it worked?"

...

Clutching his shotgun, Leo threw his body onto the dirt of the overlook, pulling binoculars out from his pack. He took the opportunity to catch his breath; he had been walking for several miles.

He scanned the horizon, wary for any possible threats. He looked for telltale signs of a burrow that might indicate a dormant headcrab or an antlion trap. Thankfully, the ground seemed unbroken.

Finally, he spotted a dull red cone sticking out of the ground. The gnome had been successfully sent miles away from home, further than they had ever successfully sent something before. With his prize in hand, Leo started the arduous trek back to the base.

...

The sun rose on a hopeful landscape. The cracked and winding road through the mountains sat waiting to be repaired so it could be used again. The solitary decaying gas station stood waiting for travelers who would soon arrive. Leo stepped outside of the brick building to find Shaun in his hiding place and relieve him of his post.

Inside, the science team was checking the internals of the teleporter to make sure their test the previous day hadn't caused any wear on the system. Unexpectedly, they heard a sound cutting through the static on the radio nearby.

That's odd.

Malachi wasn't supposed to call for another day. Who else would be on this channel?

"This is Captain Halko. I am contacting you about a proposal."

A brief pause, as though someone else is speaking to him.

"My time here is very short, so listen close: I know about your research. We need your help to liberate the citizens of City 27. Send one representative to meet my man at the old rifle range. Come alone."

The minutes following the mysterious broadcast were laden with tension. Heather left briefly to bring Leo and Shaun over to discuss this development. Autumn was the first one to speak up.

"What are we waiting for? Isn't this exactly why we worked on this teleporter in the first place?"

Heather disagreed with Autumn's position, as usual.

“That channel is supposed to be for Malachi only. It’s an obvious trap.”

Shaun added a suggestion, having just woken up from his sleep.

“We should forget we heard it and double the guards.”

At first he didn’t realize he was volunteering.

“I mean... one of you guys should stand guard for a while. I’m still going back to sleep.”

Leo was next, backing up Autumn.

“Even if it is a trap, they already know we’re here. It won’t be long before they find us. I should go and find out what is they want. If we don’t figure that out, they might compromise our position.”

Dr. Kowalski had the final word.

“There are just too many unknowns. We get our orders from Malachi, and we don’t talk to other cells. This isn’t an experiment where we can just change our equations - we only have one shot at survival. We have to ignore the message. We’ll inform Malachi tomorrow when we send our findings.”

Dr. Corey nodded grimly. The other doctor had persuaded him. Each resistance member had their own opinion, but at the end of the day they followed the sage advice of the doctors.

...

Night fell on the empty road outside of the makeshift laboratory. Only a few minutes into Shaun’s night watch, and he was already snoring. After all, having someone watch the road was just an extra precaution. But his snoring provided the perfect opportunity for a cloaked figure to walk right out the front door.

The rifle range was only a few miles from the gas station. The sign at the front driveway leading up to the building that used to be part of the range was chipped and forlorn. Autumn let herself into the building, knowing that the owners were long gone.

The interior of the building hadn’t fared much better than the exterior. The cracked walls were coated in dust and there was no sign anyone had been inside for years. Autumn was about to leave when the soldier from the militia finally revealed himself. She could just make out the camouflage pattern of his shirt in the dim lighting.

“Thanks for coming alone. I’ll keep this short. In one month, we’re going to try to start moving people out of City 27. We need your team to meet us here to help us construct a transporter inside the city walls. Can you do that?”

Autumn considered what he was asking. This was exactly what their research had been building up to, but the plan was risky to the point of being foolhardy.

“I can’t really speak for my team. I’ll have to let them know what your plan is and see what they decide.”

She wouldn’t have come if she didn’t fully intend to follow through, but she didn’t trust this stranger enough to overplay her hand just yet.

“Fair enough. Let them know. But just remember, we’re going to get those people out with or without you. We stand a much better chance with your help. And it would be very unfortunate if any of us were captured, now that we know you’re here.”

The last sentence spoken by the soldier sounded almost rehearsed, as if he had been specifically instructed to say it. He didn’t wait for any further discussion before leaving the way he had come in.

...

Dr. Corey set the package down on the floor of the teleporter. The package consisted of a hard drive with their new breakthroughs on the teleporter, a binder with their handwritten notes, and a letter to Malachi explaining their decision.

The science team watched in grim silence as the teleporter platform and their research ascended. After Autumn had spoken to the soldier, they couldn't really refuse the mysterious offer. The only thing left for them was to inform Malachi about their new obligations.

Just like the gnome two days ago, the package disappeared in a flash of lightning. Several days passed before they received Malachi's response.

...

The sun rose on a foreboding landscape. The cracked and winding road through the mountains left no trails of anyone who might have used it. Five minutes into Leo's watch, something stirred near the gas station. It could have been nothing, but Leo decided it was worth pursuing. With his trusty shotgun in hand, he marched down the road towards the gas station.

Dr. Kowalski rummaged through the pallets in the storage room, looking for his spare wrench. Without warning, he was thrown against the brick wall. His senses were overwhelmed by a blinding light and deafening thunderclap. When his sight returned, there was a darkened metal object embedded in the center of the room. It was a Combine headcrab shell.

How could this get here?

The Doctor looked up at the ceiling; there was no visible entrance hole. It was as if the rocket had materialized out of thin air. He didn't have much time to waste. Thankfully he had landed right next to the team's ammo supply. He reached for his pistol only to realize he had left it in another room. There was nothing he could do to stop the creatures emerging from the top of the shell.

Matthew heard the crash of the headcrab shell as he was fetching his breakfast rations out of the refrigerator. Heather was with him; she dropped her clipboard and ran to the door. Down the hallway and across the atrium, she could see the smoking shell sitting in the storage room.

Dr. Kowalski's pistol was sitting on the edge of the window. Backpedaling into the room, Heather picked up the gun. In a matter of seconds, the first headcrab was crawling through the door. She tried to line up a shot and squeezed the trigger desperately. The creature leaped into action, knocking the pistol uselessly into the corner.

Inside the explosives storage, Shaun witnessed his teammates' unfortunate demise. He picked up a board and nailed it into place over the door frame, sealing himself in the room with Martha, one of the other guards.

"Cut the ladder loose!"

Martha nodded and ascended to the second floor. Dashing into the adjacent room, she took aim with her submachine gun and severed the ladder, toppling it to the ground.

Behind her, there was a clap of thunder followed by a loud metal groan. Slowly, she turned around and reentered the room, wary of the explosives. Instead, she found a second headcrab rocket.

"Shaun?"

...

Hearing the loud clap of teleportation coming from the lab, Leo raced back as quickly as he could. He sprinted down the hallway, ignoring his laser tripwire, and stopped short of the atrium. Directly ahead of him, the teleporter activated. A man wearing a Civil Protection uniform stood at the top of the teleporter assembly, holding a pulse rifle.

Malachi took in his surroundings through the lenses of his mask. Below him, a single resistance fighter stood poised with a shotgun. Shouldering his pulse rifle, Malachi fired two shots into the boy's chest, ending his life instantly.

What a waste.

He hadn't intended for any of this to happen. By aligning the local resistance scientists with the Combine, he had created peace in City 27. He couldn't let the militia change that.

When the slow teleporter platform finally reached the floor, he wasted no time in gathering up all the research materials he could find, mindful of any headcrabs left in the base. Once he had stacked everything neatly on the teleporter pad, he reset it to send him right back to where he had come from.

...

Sealed inside the generator room, Autumn grappled with the thing that used to be Dr. Corey. Finally, she forced it against the powerbox on the wall, pushing with all her might and letting the monster's momentum carry it. The zombie's body contacted the conductors in the box and burned immediately, crippling it.

Returning her attention to the window, Autumn saw a single Combine officer with her research ascending on the teleporter platform.

You're not getting away with this.

She pulled on the generator lever, intent on stopping him in his tracks. Unfortunately it wouldn't budge. Pulling harder, she noticed the blood streaming from the wound on her abdomen. The zombie's claws had left her badly injured. Straining against the metal lever, she finally pulled it into the OFF position. She was too late; immediately before the power switched off, she heard the sound of her attacker teleporting to safety. She collapsed into a heap beneath the switch.

Dust settled on the abandoned building. Once, it had been an industrial space. Now, it was a crypt, entombing the scientists who lay inside. No one was left to tell their story.

Too Far by Tiop

Dear Frederick,

I am writing you today to ask a simple question, have we gone too far? I understand that Hope's project with the suppression field is a project of the utmost importance but I feel like some of this research is getting extreme even for your tastes. Regardless of my personal feelings I also question the security of the bases. With the senator's aggression in City 27, I fear Malachi's retaliation. While our facility is well hidden, Malachi is not one to be easily fooled, and being within his zone of control, I must fear the worst. If Malachi doesn't attack you are still vulnerable to discovery by the combine. I think retracting our assets at this point in time would prevent an unfavorable outcome.

Truthfully,
Thomas

Thomas,

Doctor Kent and I have made progress and the convenience of the city's vast resources makes our position risky but worth it. While your concern is valid we will not withdraw. We will move some of the operations to the power plant as that is an easier position to defend. Kent installed a security system that will greatly improve our chances at the Salvotech facility. Hope's suppression device is in its final stages and with it Malachi will be a much smaller threat to us. I had hoped that she would have been here to see it. The Combine seem to stay closer to the center of the city and there is little risk of detection. Please tell me that things back at the mining town are transitioning smoothly. I know that my absence has led to chaos in the past.

Steadfastly,
Frederick

Frederick,

Thomas asked me to write you as to give an update on the status of things back here at the old mining town. Things have been going well. The men are beginning to seem to listen to me. I mean the soldiers always listen, I am the leading officer of this company after all. The exciting news is that even the rescued men seem to listen to me. I am becoming a strong leader like the Admiral was.

Thomas is worried about your position. I know it is still hard to hear, but I don't want us to lose any more men. Malachi worries us, as he is a mad man. Malachi has been sending public broadcasts to the other resistance networks. It worries me because he might spark an interest in the area, and conflict and attention only lead to Combine and death. We are soldiers but we are limited, please heed my advice and withdraw, or at least listen to Thomas. We went too far this time. Malachi has had his eye on us for months now. He is waiting for the perfect time to strike. He isn't rash, he is cold and calculated. Don't let your ego blind you like it has in the past. Please listen to me.

Sincerely,
Captain Halko

Halko,

I will never let my ego blind me again. Nor will I allow anyone to jeopardize our findings. In the worst case scenario there will be some casualties, but this was carefully taken into account. Kent has been puttering around, but has managed to finally clunk his head together enough to make a workable test. We should have the results ready for publish in less than a month's time. Hope's work will be completed next. Our hour of victory is in hand!

From,
Frederick

Kent,

It has been sometime since I last wrote you but we have discovered some disturbing trends. We sent some covert messages to the rebel cell supposedly working on a new teleporter south of here. They replied and agreed to help us evacuate citizens from City 27, but then we lost contact with them. We can only assume the Combine got to them first, or maybe even Malachi. Also when you see Fredrick please tell him that Emily has been acting strange lately and that I could use his advice (The missing senator's Emily not the injured security guard). Overall both here and there the extent of the Malachi problem, may be greater than we thought.

Furthermore I don't understand why your research needs to be so far away from the protection of our camp and what resources a city could possibly offer that we don't have. I can't seem to convince the others how dangerous you staying out there is, but it is. Malachi has become a major power. I just pray he doesn't know about you or your research. Please at least relocate to the power-plant, you just don't have enough men to properly man that facility.

Sincerely Concerned,
Your Captain

Captain,

I think the security systems here are well equipped to dispatch anyone who might try to come after my research, Combine or otherwise.. If you see the attached folders we have put together intelligence on all known resistance agents who might be associated with Malachi. As you can see we understand our threats quite well, and we do have a plan. Frederick has been working hard on deciphering Hope's old research notes and he said that he might have use for the people we capture in his experiments. I don't know what he means by that either but rest assured the situation is handled.

Agreeably,
Doctor Kent

My Friend Halko,

The Emily situation is a bit concerning, and I will talk to her next time I visit. Until my visit keep a close eye on her, I don't want her jeopardizing the secrecy of the village. I just hope she doesn't try anything foolish because her husband as you know is not on the top of our friends list. Speaking of which Malachi has been broadcasting on several unencrypted channels his protection services for lost citizens. I don't know what game he is playing but it seems a bit suspicious.

Please tell Thomas that the old Aperture equipment is fair game for tinkering and if he can get any of it working I would be extremely interested.

Thanks,
Fredrick

Dr. Kent,

You're interrogating soldiers? I thought you were a scientist, or at least Frederick's assistant. I stayed back at the main camp because I could do my research there with no threat of detection. You were supposed to conduct your studies and get out. Every day you put us all at a greater risk. I don't get angry easy. You know that I am a very rational person, but the fact that you are willing to risk the well-being of my life and all the people we care about for "resources" that you won't even name is inexcusable. The city is Combine occupied, and unless you need either terrified humans or living breathing Combine that literally have tracking devices inside them then the city doesn't provide you anything that we don't have here. I am not concerned with your experiments success or failure and your reputation need not take a hit if you come back now. I am concerned with your safety and the wellbeing of our men. The combine have near infinite resources, the only chance of survival is to remain undetected. That is the most vital of our concerns.

Sincerely,
Dr. Thomas

Frederick,

I am extremely frustrated. You need to come back to the mining village. Thomas has been doing some extensive research on the equipment from the last raid, and it seems that he almost has a light-bridge of sorts worked out. The research notes are attached as requested. This was all done on raids from low risk missions. The key word is low-risk. You of all people know the danger of live raids. Raids are dangerous enough as they are which is why we do extensive planning to prepare for them and we don't stay exposed any longer than we need to. Why are you going back to work with Kent at his facility? You yourself had said that Kent has lost touch with reality. I hope you can see why I am extremely frustrated. I don't mean to blame what happened to Hope on you. We both know whose fault that was. However, I did warn both you and the senator before the mission. At one point you appreciated my insight. I have been talking a lot with Thomas, and with some of the other men and we like having you around the base. You add technical expertise that other people don't have and the strategic mind necessary to prepare against the dreaded Combine. I don't understand how this new tech could lead to such a breakthrough that you would abandon us. Frederick, you are a good friend who is making some bad choices. I just pray that these choices don't have horrifying consequences.

Your Friend,
Capt. Halko

Thomas,

Quite frankly my research has done much more to prevent human extinction than any of your contributions. You will see to it to never refer to me as an assistant. I have not only secured this facility for the past year, I have been conducting much of its research without support. Frederick decided that tuning the headcrab suppression device for maximum effectiveness and stability was not worthy of his time and he has been off working on his own project at the power plant. I would be willing to list both him and Hope as co-authors of this project, but I completed the fine tuning of the calculations. (Please see attached) I apologize that this information could not be transmitted via electronic means but the lines are not secure and it is too much of a risk. Speaking of risks, we

mitigated the risk of Malachi's agent. The plan made by Frederick worked almost too perfectly and the girl was captured without a hitch. Frederick apparently has some holding cells at the power plant and he his holding her there like I previously mentioned. As I have said countless times, this facility is secret and secure and there is no reason as to why we would leave when there are countless other ways to tweak this new device.

Sincerely,
Kent

Captain Halko,

I just wanted to take the time to inform you that the power plant is now off limits to all staff. We are about to make a gigantic breakthrough and I can't have prying eyes spoiling the moment. The experiments are going way better than expected through just some of my own sheer brilliance. Exciting news is just waiting to be told.

Your Friend,
Dr. Frederick

Frederick,

It was good seeing you at camp again. You seem to not make a habit of visiting me when you are around so I never can quite tell when you are here or there. Kent apparently still wants to conduct research at his facility against Thomas' and my wishes I was wondering if you had any insight into that issue. Thomas wants to visit the power plant. He feels like he could provide some technical expertise, especially after some of the questions you had been asking as of recent. On a similar note what is this I hear of holding cells at the power plant? I thought you always said that keeping prisoners was way too risky, why the change of heart? Even I, a man who hates unnecessary killing, understands that we can't keep prisoners. What happened to that agent of Malachi, she surely is too dangerous to just keep around. What about Malachi? Will he not go looking for her? It just seems a bit risky. Also, on another alarming note Emily has gone missing from the camp. I am worried that she might try and reach her way back to Malachi. This is really bad news. I could really use your help.

Sincerely,
Halko

Halko,

I am glad to see you being so confident. Your leadership has clearly been formative to the camp as they have been doing many great things. As I requested earlier I do need to keep the power plant off limits just for the next week or so due to the sensitivity of our experiments. Experiments that I might add are doing way better than I could have ever dreamed. Where we are now, your Admiral would have only dreamed of. I wish I could see his face when he would have heard the results but alas the dreaded headcrab nuisance. Which I might add Kent has finalized his findings on the suppression device. And while I may only be in the alpha stages of success Kent has basically finished.

He just sent over a couple copies of his finalized work, very impressive work for that head in the clouds bonehead. Back to talking about my groundbreaking results, I have already started moving my research to the main camp, a feat which should make both you and Thomas happy. I figured that everything I can do out here I can do in a more secure spot, and I would have to wait three quarters of a year to find out if the results were successful anyways, so why not keep them more hidden. I will be personally overseeing the transition over the next week. I don't think Emily was smart enough to make it back to Malachi so I wouldn't worry about her, you overestimate her cleverness.

This doesn't mean I don't fear a strike by Malachi, which is why I took care of his agent just yesterday. Keeping her around was much too risky. I have been maintaining careful watch over Kent's base as his results are located on his server.

Our security measures are as good as they ever have been so I don't fret too much. I hope to keep in touch now that my research can decelerate for a time.

Your Greatest Friend,
Fredrick

Thomas and Halko,

Kent's base was attacked last night and he has died as a result. It was carried out by an unknown second agent and most likely orchestrated by Malachi. We were able to capture him and he is being held at the powerplant. With persuasion he has given us a couple details, but I will keep you updated as the situation continues to unfold.

From,
Frederick

Frederick,

Did I not tell you that you went too far? For goodness sakes Kent is dead! I mean Malachi knows we exist and that we are a threat. The cost benefit ratio is way off, especially because those trucks you claim you have been sending over the past week have never arrived. We need to end this before anything worse happens. I know you want revenge on Malachi but it isn't worth it. We have already gone too far, let's end this while we still can, before we lose you too. You have gone too far!

Regretfully,
Thomas

Shut Up by Tiop

It was quiet, I think it was October but I could be wrong. I remember being at my apartment building, I was taking out the trash. That's when I saw him. He seemed like a normal repairman, he had the kind of van with the painted windows. It said something like Chuck's or Chase's Plumbing and repair. Something like that. I didn't even pay attention to him, I wanted to watch the next film on Netflix. I was so stupid.

The second I passed his car he opened his door. I kept walking but I got nervous. I didn't want to think this was happening. I took a few more steps but I heard his footsteps. He was taller than me. He had to be, because what took me four steps took him two and a half. I felt his hand grab my wrist aggressively. He said,

“Shut up.”

I screamed! But a rag filled my throat. It intoxicated my senses. I couldn't stand.

The next thing I remember I was in the van. I was in the back and it was completely empty. I knew I didn't have any other chance of escape. I started beating the windows with my bare fists, but it was thick glass. He started to pull over but I was able to punch a hole in the glass. I was screaming as loud as I could, just trying to get attention. It was to no avail he opened the door before I could do anything else and before I knew it the sweet tangy taste of the rag hit me once again.

I remember that time him telling me to shut up just out of pure rage.

The next few weeks were hell. I was in some-kind of apartment complex, it was pretty run down, but it didn't matter how loud I screamed nobody heard me. Whenever he would come by I would yell for as long as I could as loud as I could. He would just wait and cover his ears. And when my mouth could produce no more sound, hell happened.

Shut up, that is the only thing he would ever say to me. he treated me like an animal and so I responded like one. And then the day I made my escape. huh, well I thought it was clever. I clogged the toilet trying to get someone's attention. It got his attention, he said "I don't even have to tell you to shut up." That was new. I got a few more words out of him. But that wasn't the end of it. he started to say things like settle down, and it will all be over soon, but that's about as far as he had gotten before you came.

I don't really know any other details and I don't really like telling this story. I kind of just want to go back to my corner and shut up.