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FINISHING HALF-LIFE IS JUST THE BEGINNING!

THE REPLAY
EXPERIENCE EXPERIMENT:
SHORT STORY EVENT NO.1

CONTENTS

Contents	3
Introduction	3
And the Winner is... ..	4
28 Days by RikersBeard	5
ExpLife by Rodolphe Bounat.....	11
Final Piece to the Puzzle by William McMahon.....	15
Witness by Drew Stearns	20
Waking Nightmare by Ross Cooper	23

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2012 I started an event called [The Replay Experience Experiment](#). Its objective was to encourage readers to replay all the Half-Life games in chronological order and to discuss the games and how we experienced those games after having been released over 14 years ago.

In addition to publishing each chapter of each game as a separate post, I was created a number of related events.

This was the first story competition. Its rules were as follows:

You must write a story of between 500 and 2500 words. The story must be set within Black Mesa from the initial incident to the end of Blue Shift. It MUST be canon – That means you can't change any of the details of the games. You can't kill Barney or have the G-man explode etc.

Of course, you don't have to use any of the existing characters at all if you don't want to.

Your story can be serious, funny, drama or any other genre you want. Just set it in Black Mesa!

The stories are listed in alphabetical order. I have made no changes to the text except to correct obvious spelling mistakes and of course, formatted them.

AND THE WINNER IS...

Witness by Drew Stearns.

Not only is it really well written, but it tells the short story of something small and insignificant.

I'm drawn to that kind of thing. Less "hero saving the world" and more "what happened when I went shopping" – if you know what I mean.

I have a couple of images of the story in my head and that's how I judged this competition. Did I "see" the events described? Was I interested in what happened next?

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed reading the entries and look out for more events connected with TREE soon.

Phillip Marlowe

Monday 16th July 2012

The name is Pen Y. Tran, pronounced, "train" and I hope this diary is now in a museum, on a free Earth and you are reading this on a holographic display. If so, "Hello folks. Have a joy-joy day"!

Black Mesa - Summer 2000: Day one.

He visited me again today. He wants me to replace one of the "Anomalous Material" canisters with one of his. He gave me some speech about saving mankind or something epic like that and said a certain group needed to be drawn out for the fight. I actually bought his spiel, guess I was pretty radical back then. And if I remember right, I'd just been bumped the final phase experiment gig by some new guy fresh of the monorail! Yea, you guessed it, Gordon Freeman. I bet if you leave the museum there's a 1000m bronze statue of him wielding his crowbar as his save us all! Sorry if I'm old and bitter folks. Let's get back to it.

Well I made the change and it was me that loaded that new sample on the "Anomalous Sample System Delivery Unit", I won't repeat what us techies called it, and delivered it to the new guy in the test chamber. I watched that Gordon Freeman pushing the sample towards the central core as the ceiling shuddered, on the shaky monitor I saw that he didn't have his helmet on! In a room bathed in radiation that idiot was exposing his brain to god knows what. I remember screaming down the mic, but to no avail. Then that infamous "Resonance Cascade Event" as it became known occurred and I was right underneath! The things I saw during those mad seconds still haunt me today, so I won't tell you, but I can say horrific is not a scary enough description.

Last thing I saw was Freeman running for the shattered exit on my badly frazzled monitor before I had to get out of a crumbling power plant room that was rapidly filling with coolant.

The room flooded just as I shut the door to the corridor, I watched through the armoured glass, which seemed to be more common in the 'Mesa than would seem necessary! A sudden shiver along my spine made me don my helmet just before a dull 'thrumph' sounded followed by the door I just shut being blasted against the opposite wall. As the corridor rapidly filled with that cool lube I noticed the 'unnecessarily' armoured glass I was looking through was cracked! The suites leak alarm sounded but I quickly silenced it.☺

When things calmed down I found myself stuck to the ceiling by the suits positive buoyancy!

Day Two.

The second day dawned with me still fighting with the suits AI, trying to teach it to be a fish with no Internet or even the local MesaNet working! I eventually gave up for 40 winks and hoped I'd figure it out when I woke up. I awoke on my feet on

the floor; apparently my helping it confused the suit! I do have 2 PhDs in applied sciences you know and that AI is very basic, I think I was being too clever for it. And that's the story I'm sticking with!☺

The section of corridor was a little over 34 feet but it took nearly an hour to traverse it and I was upside down by the time I got to the end door, (Ewoks?), leading to the maintenance room, just as it blew in with a roar!

Day Three.

I came to with a massive headache as the suits chronometer told me I had lost another day and I was starving. Luckily the coolant was non-toxic, pandering to those greenies in government and an excellent insulator so the vending machines were operable. I found a good air pocket and sat down to eat a pretty good meal and drank a good deal of soda. I used my new space as a workshop and managed to attach two desk fans to my suit and rig an audio steer system via the AI's out ports. If you could have seen me flying down a corridor like superman with fans on my arse, you would have screamed with laughter!

Day Four.

Still stuck in Black Mesa's "Deep Core Aux Power Development Facility" listening to the one dry PA speaker that works and the news is not good! The main gist of the myriad public announcements is basically kill everyone especially my man Freeman, who seems to be some kind of HEV-suited Rambo! And if my hearing is right on this wet speaker, the soldiers are saying he gets back up even when killed! I keep hearing this madness on every dry speaker I find. During the evening I started finding bodies in the fluid and worse things later on. I'd swear they were monsters, evil looking things with one reddish eye. One appeared before me in that ring corridor in a blaze of yellow-green light, gestured towards me and went "thrazzzzzt" and kind of imploded with a zingy "vvvvvrt"! I'd swear it looked surprised before it went pop.

Day Five.

I went to the lowest maintenance level today after hearing a worrying announcement about pulling out and nuking the facility. "It's the only way to be sure," I muttered chuckling to myself. A dose of black humour in the face of certain death folks, but you know I survived to tell you my tale. Maybe I hid in a fridge! Well kind of. I went ten levels down from the test chamber room and crossed my fingers. What did the nuclear explosion feel like I hear you ask.

Well it started with an almighty shove and all the coolant clouded, then a shuddering vibration set up and that made me very queasy! The suits dosimeter started to click more than usual and that was it.

No boom and no doom for me, except that I was still trapped on levels with only a single cargo lift for access, heavily locked in case of flooding.

Day Six to Ten.

Those were low days and the stuff I wrote seemed incoherent and manic. Some of it was so horrific it made me sick to my stomach as I listened, so I wiped it. You folks would not want to listen to such tripe.

Day 14.

Today day I found out my suits co2 filter was set too low. Ah!

Afternoon.

Feeling so much better I had a good old singsong. Then I turned the oxygen back to its proper setting and put the AI back in charge of my gases. Better tonight, clear and level headed, but I much preferred my euphoria earlier!! Drugs are bad kids!

Day 16 (ish!).

Feeling a little blue this morning after yesterdays clear up. Got those eight or nine floating bloating corpses, (I sniggered for the rest of the day over that!), into an ancillary room.

Where I found a flask and lunch box, "Ta Daaaaaaaa!" don't know if that was me or it actually sounded when I fount that stuff? Yes my friends, I will need help if I get out of here.

Day n.n.n.n.n.n.n.n.n.19.

The speaker crackled into life during the night and I heard a rescue party sending out a message to survivors! I was elated and managed to get in contact with them via my suits radio, it was spotty but I managed to relay my position. I am going home!

Afternoon.

Now I'm suspicious. Did I just give my position to the murdering bar-stewards, keeping it clean for my future readers, or genuine rescuers? Another thought also has occurred to me. How in the blue hell did they hear my suit radio through all this coolant and concrete?

Late Evening.

Yes my future chums, you guessed right! That message was either a dream or I'm going nuts, or both!

Day 20.

Main power has been off for three days now and the food is all but gone or inedible. Have you ever eaten a brown limp banana, it was pretty rank but I was in

no position to be choosy. If any of those dads snigger over that statement you have my permission to chuck them out! Plenty of coke and soda has given me a nice buzz and I feel great. Nighty-night future peeps!

Day 23.

On the radio I found this morning transmitting a call to my sinister Mr Suit asking him to come and save me and bring sandwiches in that Joe90 case of his!

Oh I gotta tell you peeps about your beloved god Freeman. I met him in the canteen on that famous day and all I can say is what an arse! He blew up my breakfast in the microwave, what an idiot! I sent him a very stern email I can tell you. Oh, and I've developed a theory about his sudden military weapons prowess. Gather around on your hover boards future children and listen carefully. Joe90 had glasses that could be programmed to give him tech skills so maybe that's the deal with Freeman's retro specs. He's just a programmed weapon in Mr Suit's arsenal!

Now hover off its time for bed. Goodnight Jim Bob!

Deus 24.

Found a games console unit in a sealed locker and spent the day playing "Deus Ex" a brand new game that I had not even seen in the shops, this guy had connections. Amazing stuff! It took me back to the days the 'Mesa was a happy ship full of talented people on the edge of the scientific frontier while I hid in a storage locker playing vid games! I was a lazy git, but talented and hard working, just not all the time.☺ Nearly had to stop before the finish but luckily my suits energy output saved the day. Seven hours of escapist fun left me relaxed and sane.

Day 25.

Played some more retro games and old favourites of mine until the warning buzzer on my HEV ruined my fun! I felt pretty stupid but I guessed I was doomed and at least my last days had some fun. So I ended the day playing "For Fracks Sake Save Me!" on the pipes, my own composition. It's occurred to me that keeping this diary is probably hastening my death. Funny eh.

Day 26.

Food has gone, suit power is now on emergency reserves and I've exhausted every means of outside contact, even banging the pipes has yielded nothing, no matter what tune I play. And my little haven is starting to get a tad rank and so is the coolant. I think stuff from the upper levels is seeping down.

Night.

Suit has had it, no more diving for me, just enough power to keep this journal going and read the rad levels of my suit dosimeter. There are rising as I speak my journals last entry. I'm dictating this journal to my helmet, seem very

Shakespearian! "Alas poor HEV, I knew him well". That's allcough,
Cough,..... cough, folks!

I think I really need help now before that helmet starts speaking to me.

Day 27. Morning.

My name is Pen Y. Tran, pronounced, "train" and I hope this diary is now in a museum. I am 54 years old, married with four kids and six grandchildren, two dogs, four rabbits and some hens. Now I am going to die because I believed in what my suited friend had said, we all did and look how it turned out! Maggie I love you, tell the kids I love them and goodbye my love.

Day 28. Afternoon.

Still breathing but the air is so foul now, loosing my air bubble got to stand up.
..... diary starting to foulupdoorin Wall?
.....So,..... Bright? I see you appear to be in need of an intervention Mr Tran.
We shall see.....[DATA UNRECOVERABLE FROM THIS POINT].

That was the last element of Pendragon Y. Tran's diary to be recovered from his very damaged H.E.V. suit. No body was found near the suit and no others recovered matched his gene record. The last part of his final message scholars believe makes reference to the so called "G-Man" or "Guiding Man", and the last lines spoken was not from Tran but may actually be the first recorded voice of the g-man himself!

"G-Man", "Guiding Man", "The Guide", "The Lawyer", "Blue Suit" his many aliases, but who or what is he? An inter-dimensional being hell-bent of the destruction of our old foe, The Combine, even rumoured to be an alien entity in the guise of a man. He has always been seen as a dark suited man of great age, but not ancient in appearance, with a briefcase, like a lawyer or business man from the 20th century, mysteriously appearing to help the key players in the epic tales of "The Black Mesa Incident", "The Seven Day War", "The Occupation" and the final victory over the Combine forces. Public opinion has branded him a hero and is often seen in the role of Gordon Freeman's mentor, both in statues and media. Scholars, however view this "G-Man" with suspicion due to the abjuration the Vortigaunts show him, even though he helped "The Freeman" they revere! And since he has never spoken publicly we may never know his real intentions.

This "G-Man" remains the most intriguing being in human history. He started the "Resonance Cascade" that led to the Combine invasion, the slaughter of billions and their final defeat and mankind's rise towards the stars. And Pendragon Y. Tran was with him from the first!

Freeman is a beloved hero, G-Man is his mentor and Tran has been overlooked, but not here. We pay our respects to a man who started it all, who witnessed the "Black Mesa Massacre" remotely and may have survived as one of the G-mans "Operatives".

As it is now of public record we can at last confirm the rumour of his family's disappearance during the onset of the "Portal Storm" events to be true. All were posted as missing following the first portal event, leaving a long abandoned farm.....

To the Tran's and extended families. Live well friends.

[The Black Mesa Memorial Institute & Museum of Extraterrestrial Studies]

Daily Diary of Jonathan Irongood,
Age 32,
Lead researcher at the Black Mesa Lambda Complex
Main job : Quantum analyses of dimensional fluctuations between Milky Way and other borderworlds.

16th of May, 2000: 9:42

So, it all comes down to this.

Somewhere, somehow... Something went wrong.

We all knew, all scientists and guards in Black Mesa, that this day would be a special one. But even in our worst nightmares, we couldn't expect that things would go this far.

Eli Vance and Isaac Kleiner were so happy to see the results of the anti-mass spectrometer on that crystal. And so were we.

But all hell broke loose when it began: as we were looking at that guy, that Gordon Freeman who placed the crystal, we all felt what was like an enormous earthquake... starting from inside the complex.

Suddenly, some nightmarish creatures, some sentient species we sometimes caught a glimpse during our observations of the borderworld, appeared right in front of us.

I immediately ran away with some others from the labs, shutting down emergency doors while old friends, colleagues, too old or too afraid to move, were burnt to ashes by energy-throwing bipedal aliens, or were suffocated by what look liked four-legged alien crabs... How many times have I watched Alien, wondering what it could be... and now it was happening and I wished I was never here.

I need to find a way out. There must be some way out. And more importantly, find my wife. She worked near the spectrometer. I need to know if she's still alive.

11:26

The security guards gave us a hand in fighting some of these abominations. Even with all of their training, they weren't prepared to this madness.

However, even if they were afraid and clearly overwhelmed by the situation, they didn't flinch or leave us alone. One of them was Tom, I knew him well, drinking some beers after work or training with him at the shooting ranges.

And now... He's dead. As me and two colleagues, Royce and Hamilton, were behind him, walking carefully in one of the halls, a door exploded, revealing a hulking beast shooting some sorts of... bees? Was that bees? Anyways, Tom

emptied all of his ammo on that creature but to not avail. He told us to run away and gave me one last smile before being pierced by these strange hornets. As he fell down, he shot one last bullet in the face of the creature, but it simply howled and began to chase us.

As the emergency door closed behind us, the beast managed to shoot other hornets and it quickly pierced the brains of my fellow comrades.

And now I'm alone. So alone.

Whoever will read this, why did I keep fighting, will you ask?

Because of him. That guy who, ironically, started all this mess. Gordon Freeman. As I was looking at some surveillance videos, I saw him, a young scientist, crushing skulls of infested people with a mere crowbar, shooting these abominations with everything he could find, from glocks to shotguns.

And that's why I can't stop. For my wife, for my family. If this lonely mute guy can fight with all his might to save his life, then I can too.

I've found a knife and a glock, this will be enough for now.

12:43

I've just shot down Anderson. A comrade, a friend. Sometimes he came home for dinner, during weekends, with his wife and kids, he was a pretty cool guy.

And now? Infected by one of these abominations, dubbed the "headcrabs" by some guards.

As I was slowly moving in the shadows of broken corridors, I saw him, slaughtering mindlessly a guard, beating him to a pulp, and all the way screaming inhuman sounds.

I knew it was too late to save the poor guy, and I knew well that my friend was already far beyond any comeback from his current state.

But I never did that before. Shooting a man. Not that he was a man, now, but still... However, I did it. I emptied my weapon on the monster while he had his back turned on me, and it fell down, in a pool of red and yellow blood.

While breathing heavily, the sight of this alien blood quickly helped me to make up my mind and consider that this was really not Anderson anymore.

Near death, the beaten guard told me that the military forces were making their way to the complex, to clean the mess and help us.

That was it. Finally the light at the end of the bottomless pit. I will find my wife and escape of this hellish nightmare.

14:57

I can't believe it. Bastards. These BASTARDS.

This was not a search-and-rescue mission. Oh, believe me, it wasn't, for sure. After finding a still functional elevator, I pushed the button to the floor where I spotted earlier my wife, hiding behind some desks with some guards.

I was filled with so much joy, even with all these tragic deaths around me. I'll be reunited with her, and then the soldiers will provide us with a way out.

Or so I thought. As the elevator's doors opened, I saw a complete inferno. The militaries were shooting not only the aliens, but also everyone. Everyone. It seemed some smoking-wearing official bastards didn't want what happened here to reach the population. And they wanted to make sure nobody would ever talk about it.

And so, it all came down to this... My wife, turning her head towards the elevator... Seeing me... Smiling at me... Running at me... I was already crying of joy, opening my arms to greet her. After so much trouble!!!

And suddenly, I heard the shots. I saw her white lab coat suddenly recovered with red colors... And she fell on her knees... She was coughing, coughing so violently... Saliva, and blood. She rose her head one last time, her smile still on her beautiful face... And I was she was armed, too. Her right hand shot the elevator buttons, making the engine shut the doors and ascending more, as I was screaming all the way...

And her left hand... Slowly pulling out the pin of a grenade, as soldiers were running past her and towards me.

I didn't see what happened. And I wished it never happened. But I heard the explosion. And I knew it was over.

It was over. All over!! No way out, from the beginning. Whatever I've survived this far, the only exit was death. I had nothing left at this moment. No more objectives, motivations.

All that was left was death. I knew this Freeman guy was still fighting, apparently trying to launch a rocket to stop the invasion.

Well, I'll never know him and he'll surely never know me, but if I can give him a hand by blowing some of these evils guys, humans and aliens alive, surely it will be a good way to say goodbye to this world.

17:29

Beautiful. That rocket launched high in the sky was beautiful.

I saw it well, nearly burning my eyes by merely watching the flames.

I'm bleeding, also. That was a hell of a fight, to make my way through the hordes of the soldiers and aliens, but I was lucky they fought each other.

It was all easier now. Blowing guts and brains, crushing creatures already agonizing on the floor... I was hit many times, but never deadly, by claws, hornets, bullets, lightning bolts...

My skin is burnt on so many areas, my lungs... slowly drowning in my own blood... I was looking at my own reflection on a broken glass, I wasn't physically so different than these abominations.

But now, I feel... no more sadness, no more happiness. Only. Emptiness.

I found - at last - the one guy, a red beret-wearing soldier, some "Colonel Kilgore", who ordered the shooting in the room where my wife was... I first heard his name in some radio conversations. And then, I tracked him.

Interrogating some wounded soldiers, sometimes... with violent ways, I couldn't even recognize myself... And I'm happy to be an atheist, as thinking about my dead wife watching me from "the Heavens" doing all this mess... would have been unbearable.

So, this guy, Kilgore. I shot him in the legs and the stomach, and he screamed so much. He was at the top of some barracks, near the edge, at 100 feet over the floor... A floor where dozens of those "headcrabs zombies" were wandering aimlessly, having already slaughtered everyone, scientists, guards, and soldiers presents.

The guy was a soldier. He knew that death would be coming anyway, during a mission. But maybe not in that way, in the shape of a near dead poor scientist with practically no experience in warfare and battlefields.

I told him the name of my wife, who was slaughtered by his men, on his orders. He told me that he has orders, too, and my quest was already foolish from the beginning, as I will never be able to reach the guys behind all of that.

I told him that I could live with that. I only needed to go out with a bang.

In the same ground where my wife died. And then I pushed him off the edge of the building. He screamed while falling, and was already dead on the floor when the headcrab zombies started to smash his corpse in pieces.

Emptiness. Nothing was left. My hope was gone the moment my wife's body hit the floor, dead.

Now, there is one guy, one free man, who's caring the hopes of all of us, the living, the dead... of all the humanity. I don't hope he'll succeed in his mission. I know he will.

Behind me, I hear the creatures smashing the door, and coming to finish me. This is not important. Not anymore. What's important is... One man, one guy... If he has one objective and if he does, whatever it takes, to accomplish this objective. Believe me, he'll succeed.

17:24 (the page is covered with blood and random stains of ink)

Chapter 1: One Size Fits All

Unknown to most, metal oxidation can often cause the rancidity of food and rancid food can bring about one terrible case of indigestion. Steve knew this... Steve knew a lot of things the scientists of Black Mesa did not. Steve also knew that improper use of air conditioning was the number one cause for stress in the work place. Steve didn't like air conditioning. Today the air was cold, dry and tasted of oxidized metal. This was common in Black Mesa and was a constant reminder that Steve was under thousands of feet of rock and dirt. Oxidization and thermal comfort aside, Steve loved his job. He couldn't imagine doing anything else in life. When he wasn't scurrying around the hallways of the Lambda Complex he was enjoying a snack in the closest cafeteria.

Today was Tuesday, most of the scientists of the research complex were focused on supersymmetry, an extension of the Standard Model and Poincare symmetry, a concept realised in nature implying that all particles have supersymmetric partners. Steve knew what a particle was, beyond that he didn't have a clue. So instead of wasting his time in the research labs he scurried around the Black Mesa Hazard course. Steve knew that being a great scientist not only meant flexing your brain, but also the rest of the muscles in your body as well. Steve was strong, fast, and nimble – no scientist could ever catch Steve. This Tuesday was special, this Tuesday Steve saw Gordon Freeman.

The lights flickered in the shooting range signifying to Steve that a new candidate was approaching. The gentle hum of florescence was a welcome change from the constant vibrations and machine like sounds of the facility. The hologram began...

"You'll have to hit every target to complete the course..."

When were they ever going to swap out Gina for a newer model Steve thought? He admired Freeman from afar, a fairly tall mid 20's scientist fresh out of school and ready to start his career as a Black Mesa scientist! His green eyes shot through his thick black rimmed glasses... Steve always wanted to wear glasses, but unfortunately glasses didn't really sit right on his small face. The Hazardous Environment suit fit Gordon like a glove. The HEV suit was sold as a "one size fits all" product... Steve knew very well that one size did not always fit all; most sizes certainly didn't fit him.

"Commencing sequence in five, four, three, two, one..."

Freemans MP5 lit up like a Christmas tree, bullets flew over Steve. Each target hit with expert precision. The targets creaked into view and seconds later Gordon popped a few rounds into it. He swivelled his body at each passing cardboard cut-out. Finally, he launched a grenade over the unbreakable glass splintering the target behind it. The target room was a mangled mess of wood and gun powder. Steve stood in awe; Gordon casually lifted his weapon, checked the chamber for clear rounds and blew gently into the chamber clearing it of dirt.

Steve wanted to be a scientist... no... Steve wanted to be Gordon Freeman. Alas, Steve was a rat.

Chapter 2: Lab Rat

Steve never liked the term rat; he disassociated himself with the common pet rat often used in experiments throughout the complex. He didn't mind that the Muridae (the family of mammals which includes mice, rats and gerbils) were commonly used for experimentation, in fact most of his brothers and sisters were glad to be taking part in scholarly expeditions. Black Mesa certainly kept things interesting for his kind, things like teleportation, electromagnetism, quark flavouring, gluon plasma based experiments and studies on the early effects of the formation of the universe were a lab rats dream. Steve had no interest in becoming a lab rat.

Kenneth Humason, no relation to the famous astronomer Milton Humason, brought Steve to Black Mesa in the early days of its foundation. Kenneth never kept Steve in a cage, he operated on the principal that "A rat that always came home for dinner was a rat worth keeping". Steve always came home for dinner. Years ago Steve witnessed the old ICBM launch complex in the middle of New Mexico turn into the greatest scientific research center the world has ever known. He was there when they turned on the dam, he was there when they laid the first track of the rail system, and he even saw them construct the famous "Sector C Test Lab". Steve knew all the shortcuts through the facility and most importantly all the places to get the best food.

At 8:47AM Steve was enjoying a left over bagel in the small cafeteria by the locker room of Sector C. The cafeteria was empty, but he knew in a few moments Dr. Arne Magnusson would be around to heat up his famous mushroom casserole. Steve didn't want to be around Magnusson. Magnusson believed that all species of the superfamily Muroidea were pawns in the great game of science. This did not jive with Steve's plans to become a great scientist. Steve had three minutes to finish his breakfast because today was a big day. Today was the day they would turn on the Anti-Mass Spectrometer. Steve loved the Anti-Mass Spectrometer, although he had no idea what it did, he knew that a successful test meant late night celebrations of steak dinners and red wine.

Excitement aside, Steve maintained a dash of uneasiness. The night prior he awoke from a terrible nightmare. The dream began much like the others, with him standing on an extra-large Pork rib floating down a river of Turkey Gravy. As the channel of gravy narrowed Steve heard a distant rumbling, the gravy turned to green toxic sludge, and the pork rib now one of the famous trams of Black Mesa. Ahead of him was a drop, he'd never rode a tram down a waterfall before, but he felt at ease, like someone was watching and taking care of him. The tram fell into the abyss; Steve felt the tram pick up speed breaking terminal velocity when suddenly everything vanished. Steve hung suspended in air, or what seemed like air, for a moment before the face appeared. The figure, an older gentleman with black hair, sunken skin, one blue and one green eye and a skinny business tie spoke softly and with purpose.

“Prepare to define your legacy...”

Looking back on the dream made Steve even more uncomfortable. He'd often have nightmares of the domesticated cats of Black Mesa infinitely chasing him down dark corridors, but he knew it was just a dream. Never did a dream leave him with uneasiness the next day... until now. He tried to shake the dream and made his way to the Anti-Mass spectrometer. He ran through the vents and nuzzled himself against an opening. From his position he could see the towering device, its concrete top, the three oval beads that hung lifelessly in the middle and the small view window where most of the scientists huddled to view the rise of discovery.

Chapter 3: Green Lotus

There he was, Gordon Freeman, crossing the threshold into the test chamber. Steve recognized him immediately, he knew today was special and he had a feeling he would see the Freeman again.

“Your suit should keep you comfortable through all this...”

Steve watched in anticipation, he witnessed more tests in this chamber than he could count on his four paws (which equated to 18); this one was different. Gordon climbed the nearby ladder to start the rotors. The machine hummed with electricity, the dual rotors rotated in opposite directions.

“Power to stage one emitters in 3...2...1...”

The three suspended ovals connected to the concrete piece by electric beams. Emitted below that was on thick electric beam.

“Power to stage two emitters... now”

The three suspended ovals now connected to the base of the machine.

“It's probably not a problem.... Probably...”

This immediately alarmed Steve; these words were foreign to the Anti-Mass Spectrometer process. Steve never understood what the problem was or what caused it, but this problem would change his life forever. It would change the world forever. He adjusted himself and prepared for unforeseen consequences as Gordon readied himself to push the cart of unknown substance into the beam. Steve was overcome with uneasiness, he knew he wasn't getting steak tonight, he doubted whether or not he would be alive. The substance entered the beam and a terrible alien sound echoed through the chamber.

“Shutting down... attempting shut down... it's not, it's not, it's not shutting down!”

A beam of electricity shot from the Anti-Mass Spectrometer into the view port, blood and dismemberment shot into the test chamber. Steve jerked back deeper into the ventilation chamber, Gordon was alone, but not for long. Tall green creatures started falling from the ceiling of the chamber, disappearing before hitting

the ground, green balls of energy in their wake. Steve was overcome with a flash of green light, then suddenly darkness.

Chapter 4: Defining a Legacy

Steve awoke in a small puddle of blue sparkly liquid – he felt strangely rejuvenated in it. He looked around, first to the sky. Above him danced various hues of purple, green and blue morphing into a beautiful nebula like arrangement. He was mesmerized by the horizon as light pushed through and reflected off the green, fleshy ground. Steve stepped out of the pond and onto the ground; it was strangely sponge like, with every step his sharp claws dug into the ground with ease. Pillars of green bone climbed into the sky, he felt small in comparison, smaller than he usually felt. Islands of rock and flesh orbited the mass he situated himself on. There seemed no discernible way out of this mess; no way down and certainly no exit doors.

He took a few steps and another flash of green light overwhelmed him, more darkness then he found himself back in familiar setting of Black Mesa. Back in the test chamber the world was crumbling around him. Steve found himself face to face with an unknown creature. “This was no cat” Steve thought... “This was worse”. Steve looked feverishly for Gordon, he was nowhere in sight. The creature lowered its body and looked towards Steve, it stood on four extremely sharp singular laws. Underneath was an assortment of teeth circled around the perimeter of the lower body. At the front of the body were four hanging feelers with smaller claws extending towards Steve. Steve ran, and the creature pursued. It jumped 3 feet in the air and landed a foot from Steve. Steve scurried and the creature continued its pursuit jumping from location to location. The two of them played a manic game of “ring around the rosy” until finally Steve positioned himself at the opening of the Anti-Mass Spectrometer. The creature approached in front of him ready to make another pounce. It flew through the sky and Steve strafed out of the way. The creature hit the ground with a thud and slit into the Anti-Mass Spectrometers base, a horrendous high pitch scream was let out and then a sizzle as the creature suffered from what Steve could describe as spontaneous radiation burns.

Steve caught his breath and assessed the situation, he knew the layout of the test chamber... the only way in from the ground level was through the retinal scanner door behind the blast doors and unfortunately it was shut. Steve slid into a nearby vent and shimmied through the inner workings of electrical wires. Behind him another flash of green light and suddenly Gordon Freeman appeared. Steve as elated, finally a familiar face... some light in all this darkness. Steve watched Gordon assess his situation, exploring the ruined test chamber and making his way through the large blast doors. Gordon attempted to use the retinal scanner, but it screamed out incomprehensible gibberish. Gordon was stuck and it was up to Steve to help him.

Steve hurried as he didn't want Gordon to falter; he managed to open these doors in the past. Often food stuffs were kept behind security doors. He traced the two cables that ran from the retinal scanner to the door and found the

communication line that led back to the security server room. Steve opened his jaw and started to chew on the communication line, with it exposed he turned his attention towards the line that gave the scanner power; he chewed on this to expose the copper. He crossed the two lines together shorting out the communication interface card on the retinal scanner. The door forced itself open breaking some of the locking devices and Gordon was free.

Steve felt accomplished, he helped the very man he wanted to be. Steve followed Gordon through Black Mesa ensuring that his path was clear and doors opened. He followed Gordon in the upper Office Complex unlocking various security doors. He activated conveyor belts when Gordon was ambushed by the military. He rode underneath the rail cart as Gordon made his way for the Lambda Complex. He feared for Gordon's life when he was taken hostage by the grunts. Steve activated the various pieces of machinery in the processing plant. Travelled with Gordon through the various teleports of the Lambda Core and finally helped to destroy the Nihilanth by jumping into the skull and chewing on his brain.

The adventures of Steve were many. Steve never became a scientist, but without him the most famous scientist of all would have failed even the simplest of tasks. The man in his dream was right; Steve was finally given the chance to define his legacy.

WITNESS BY DREW STEARNS

The fine layer of desert dust that coated every square inch of the Area 8 Topside Dormitories suddenly leapt into the air. The heavy particles – scraped from the tops of nearby buttes and blown in by the searing desert winds - fell back to the ground as the rest dissipated into a cloud, forming a waist-high layer of orange fog.

Nicholas felt sick. Had he not touched down from his turbulence-ridden flight nearly an hour ago? Was he not on solid ground here in Black Mesa? He was aware of the nearby fault lines, but this didn't feel like a geologic event. It was as if somebody had suddenly pulled a chair right out from underneath him.

He sat up from the basketball court, his face cutting a swath through the lingering mist. He turned to see Lauren, his orientation officer, already on her feet. She was slinging the arm of another recruit around her neck and lifting him from the ground. Blood was streaming from a cut above her brow.

Nicholas splayed his limbs wide and slowly rose to full height; he felt like a toddler clumsily attempting to walk. He hoped Lauren didn't notice his poor coordination; she had already shot him a contemptuous look when he took ill on the plane. He didn't want the beginning of the rest of his life to start on a sour note. Upon standing, he sheepishly turned to meet her gaze, but she was gone.

The asphalt at his feet had cracked and warped to look like the dry desert floor that stretched for miles in every direction outside the dormitory gates. The chain link fence that surrounded the basketball court – built to keep balls from plunging into the nearby canyon where the monorail track for the Black Mesa Transit System dove thousands of feet underground – was twisted like a decorative ribbon. The concrete anchors that secured the fence posts were partially exposed, as if a giant hand had pressed the earth down on all sides, the way a gardener flattens the soil around the trunk of a newly planted tree.

As Nicholas stumbled outside the fence's perimeter, he nearly impaled himself on a spiraling column of green-tinted glass the circumference of his arm that extended out of the ground and toward the sky. The tips of the projections were molten-orange and emanated significant heat. The Quadrangle – a dusty common area centrally located among the maze of trailer-dormitories - was dotted with the alien-looking structures; one unfortunate soul had been pierced through the calf and was being tended to by medical staff. Nicholas could see the victim's face yelping with pain, but the cry was drowned out by an automated voice warning of a power failure in Sector C, wherever *that* was.

Continuing on past the Quad, Nicholas strained to move against the throngs of Area 8 residents who had simultaneously poured out of their dormitories, hoping to find an answer as to source of the disturbance. The only place he could think to go was the communications building on the south side of the complex where he was sure Lauren had an office. To reach Topside Communications Bunker 8-C, he had to find the miniature suspension bridge that spanned the transit canal.

Signpost after signpost layered with indecipherable acronyms and arrows pointing all directions stymied Nicholas' progress. The trailer-dormitories surrounding him were arranged in a tight grid and limited his ability to see any distance downfield, so, he resorted to looking upwards, finding the sun hanging over the back of his left shoulder. He adjusted his path and dove into an alleyway, trying to keep as straight a path as possible.

Passing underneath the open windows of Area 8 denizens, he heard the same automated voice from the Quadrangle. It was synchronized from residence to residence. Nicholas figured it was a broadcast from an emergency radio system. The voice continued to report a power outage in Sector C but with the addendum, "high energy detonation detected in Materials lab." The words knotted Nicholas' stomach, but he pressed on through the narrow passageways, determined to find Lauren. He smiled with the thought of how impressed she would be when he finally tracker her down among the chaos. That would make up for getting sick on the plane, *right?*

Absorbed by his fantasy, Nicholas was taken aback when he finally emerged from the thicket of temporary housing. Lying before him was a sweeping view of the canal and communications building. He had overshot the bridge by a few hundred yards, but at least his destination was in sight.

The canal appeared to be set within a naturally occurring rift in the desert bed. The monorail track was anchored in the middle, snaking right and left with the lateral topography of the gorge. Another couple hundred yards past the bridge, he could see where the concrete walls of the canal gave way to the natural rock of the cliffs. Beyond that, the track dove down into the canyon where it was swallowed by a circular opening in the cliff face. It was a spectacular sight, the pictures from the brochure paled in comparison.

After a moment's pause, Nicholas made for the bridge. The canal walkway was choked with panic-stricken Black Mesa personnel. Their faces pressed against his shoulders, he could feel them trembling. Nicholas kept his eyes locked on the bridge, less his composure wilt completely. As he inched closer to his goal, the surrounding destruction intruded on his focus. Large fissures crept along the canal walls, water gushed from immense pipelines exposed by the collapsed topsoil, greenish-gray smoke seeped from the Transit System tunnel entrance deep in the canyon.

"Move n' go, move n' go, move n' go..."

It had been many years since Nicholas had chanted his mantra. Not since the days of endless running; when his legs felt like iron and his lungs like bags of sand. While his current pace was more of a halting, jostling crawl, the quiet repetition helped put one foot ahead of the other. Just like old times.

He was nearly even with the bridge now, only a ten-yard wide cross current of humanity in his path. A gap appeared in the stream of bodies and Nicholas

exploded forward. Three steps into his sprint across the stampeding crowd, his right foot snagged on an uprooted fiber optic cable. For the second time within an hour, Nicholas was unexpectedly eye-to-eye with the pavement. He scrambled into a crawl, knowing it was not enough to escape the thundering footfalls that would soon pulverize his body.

The mob slowed then stopped. Nicholas was bewildered by the sudden display of good will, but he was grateful for it. He grasped on to one of the bridge's steel cables and pulled himself up. After a few gasps of air, he looked at the motionless crowd only to find their gaze fixed on something behind him.

A semi-transparent green dome, emanating from beyond the horizon, filled the sky. As it grew, cloud-like rings began to encircle its rippling surface while jagged bolts of emerald lightning streaked along its ever-expanding mass, *up* into the sky. The scale of the approaching storm was beyond comprehension, and Nicholas could not make sense of it. Indeed, he remained frozen in place, even as the otherworldly shockwave pulsed through his body and snuffed the light from his eyes.

A sea of darkness, in every direction, forever.

Suddenly: pinpricks of light. They flit about. He watches.

Whispers cleave the stillness.

A rush of warm air.

Approaching footsteps. Louder, closer. They stop. They turn.

The profile of a man. He is standing, arms down at his sides.

A figure walks in the darkness. It takes measured steps.

The figure strides up to the man and stops. It places a hand on the man's shoulder. The man stirs, as if awakening.

The figure speaks in tongues, the man doesn't respond. A curtain is drawn, the two disappear.

Footsteps, closer still.

They stop.

A door opens.

Light floods in.

WAKING NIGHTMARE BY ROSS COOPER

The salty taste brought me back, my eyes slowly opened to reveal the computer monitor that had smashed into my forehead...before. It took me a few moments to realize that I was tasting my own blood. Swiping the back of my hand across my mouth only confirmed my self diagnosis, for a moment my vision swam through layers of haze.

"The Black Mesa Public Address System is now under Military Control. We ask that any surviving employees please contact us through the Emergency Switchboard...for immediate evacuation."

Evacuation? All I can recall is some ominous shaking and groaning followed by the runaway computer monitor. At the time I just figured it was another test firing of the mounted rocket over in the old silo now though-

There is a security officer outside, I see him through the glass even though I am still gathering up the energy not to mention the equilibrium to stand. Sounds I don't recognize come from the hallway followed by staccato bursts of gunfire.

"Get away from me you freak!"

Stroboscopic green light casts the officers shadow on the curved cement of the wall, then a coating of red and a strangled gurgle of sound. With one last shot the window to my office shatters glass cascading inwards forcing me to both look away and raise my hands for protection. There is a clattering sound, another this one like a person gargling and trying to eat a slice of pizza at the same time- alien.

The sound of...clawed feet moves toward me and since I'm facing the wrong way I freeze, hoping that whatever it is just continues right on past. However, the sounds slow to a stop, followed by the same strange vocalization and then slurping.

"No," I hear myself speak with conviction.

Opening my eyes I find that the officer's handgun is resting beside my right hand, I pick it up feeling its weight, bringing in my other hand I steady my grip. There is this thing and far as I can tell it's looking right at me, its sole red-orange eye takes me in- and the slightly wavering eye of my gun barrel freezes for a moment.

BANG.

The trigger was unforgiving, and the gun bucked lightly raising for the second shot. Slowly the slide rid the rails back and forward, casings cart-wheeled out and fell to the carpet. Sounds from the consecutive shots bled together into one loud roar, each bullet was followed by a strobe of light a flash that seared each impact

into my memory. Strange blood exited the creature with each shot its color wholly disturbing as it fell to the ground to land beside the officer.

CLICKCLICKCLICK.

Taking my finger off the trigger I let the gun hang at my side and remember to breathe.

Spare clips now weighed down the pockets of my lab coat, there were so many of the staff dead and changed- I needed the ammo more than they did. Walking through the halls I couldn't help but feel all the more certain that the military had confused evacuation with assassination.

Though when bullets were placed so exquisitely there seemed to be no confusion at all, these guys were serious.

All I wanted to do was get out, to live, to survive. Nothing was wrong with that except...hell nothing was wrong with that at all. It was perhaps the most sane thought being had by anyone still surviving in this facility.

The wall under my hand vibrated gently.

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"By Jove!", a muffled voice exclaimed from one of the offices ahead.

Leaning against the shaking wall I tried to keep my feet under me as I lunged forward in a series of mismatched steps, ahead of me a fluorescent light fixture came crashing down from the ceiling. From the alcove ahead I could there the loud crash of one of the many vending machines the shaking continued to grow and became exceedingly violent.

"This is brilliant!" the same voice exclaimed much closer.

Two doors ahead on the left I could see the telltale light of a television monitor, no I realized as I lunged forwards it was a CCTV monitor, I was approaching a security station. Sound and shaking died away rather abruptly to be replaced by the strange sound of something clattering along the floor.

My momentum has quickly changed direction due to an unexpected cylindrical complication.

Falling almost directly towards the door jamb ahead I put up my hands to protect my face and waited for what was sure to be a rather painful impact. The can of soda from the fallen vending machine squirted out from under my foot and pin-balled off the wall and down the hallway.

"Oh no you don't," exclaimed the same voice, "I've got you!"

Getting my feet back under me took a few moments, and my right ankle was tender, but with help I made it to a chair in the security office and sat down.

"Thanks."

"You're very welcome. It's nice to see a fellow scientist."

"Especially one that's alive."

"Quite. I see you're not from around these parts."

Looking down at my blood splattered badge I smile, no doubt I had moved into unfamiliar territory. The facility was huge and we only had access to the locations that enabled us to work, with broken doors and walls however the facility was open. Not to mention prone to collapse.

"Not exactly. What was that?"

"...oh right the shaking. T'was a fellow from Anomalous Materials...he was launching a satellite that could help contain the outbreak."

"Well that's one thing they've done right."

Both of us had a good light chuckle and he pointed to my ankle.

"Think you can walk on that because we can't stay here much longer."

"Sure, shouldn't be a problem," I said reading the name off his badge, "Ralph."

"The let's get going, Lewis," he said having read my badge. "We're going to evacuate ourselves!"

We were both out of our element now, traversing a heavily industrial area with lots of loud machinery busily working away. It was alien. Were were used to computing algorithms and test tubes not giant pistons and vats of radioactive glowing slime being stirred by sturdy stirrers made of some unknown metal. Fine this area wasn't like that at all but I can certainly imagine one just like it being somewhere in this part of the facility.

"The panel on this door is burned out perhaps we can force it open," Ralph noted pointing to the small gap between door and frame in front of us.

Both of us braced ourselves and pulled on the metal sliding door with all our strength it budged a few inches.

"I don't think it's wise for me but perhaps you could get on you back and-."

"Of course! More strength in the legs!"

Ralph moved quickly laying on his side and jamming his feet in edgewise.

"On three Lew," Ralph muttered gritting his teeth, "one...two...THREE!"

Even with our combined power the door took it's time opening any further, grinding open against it's mechanical inner workings. Grunting we worked together until the door seemed to catch on a safety causing it to freeze three-fourths of the way open. For a few moments we waited keeping pressure on the door, tensed and ready to spring into action if it began to lunge closed again.

"Go first," grunted Ralph, "I can take the weight."

Releasing my white knuckled grip on the door I stepped quickly over Ralph and into the room beyond, it was dark and smelled of mildew. Water dripped steadily somewhere in the darkness, and then the sound of feet, light fast- getting closer. Turning back towards the door I reached out to grab Ralph's hand and pull him up when sparks begin to leap off the door, he tosses me across the open space and behind a stack of heavy boxes. Landing on my side I crumple forwards and land in a tangle looking back through my askew legs I see Ralph's body tugged by bullets, his body falls to the side and the door grinds closed again. The room is swallowed by shadow.

Using the darkness as cover I've begun climbing in desperation, my vision is slowly coming back. The rods and receptors in my eye combined with my widening iris to bring all the light and detail they possibly can. Tugging hard I drag myself onto the topmost crate in the stack and lie back, trying hard to both stop my racing heart and keep my breathing quiet. The murder of my fellow scientist made it abundantly clear that I was not alone in this room- and that in this room was at least one person who wanted to kill me.

There, something, perhaps nothing, a distortion in the light- no in my sight!

The distortion freezes and then one part seems to elongate and reach forward, a water droplet falls from the ceiling and splatters the rear of the distortion. For a moment the distortion flickers to reveal a female form clad entirely in a black suit of some kind wearing a pair of goggles perched upon her nose.

"Area secured."

The insect-like face turns left and then right- then back towards me.

"Target lost. All available units vector to recover."

The stealth capabilities return and I get low on the crate and wait for a few long moments, perhaps this is the wrong call perhaps she is crawling up right now to put a bullet right between my eyes. I just want to go back to sleep, to this morning-

yesterday morning, any normal day of ones and zeros, planck levels and computational mathematical theorems.

To make it home to my wife and child.

More feet now all pattering some nearer and some further away I slowly sit up and risk a look over the edge. Nothing, that I can see. Squatting on top of the box I mentally calculate a path across the stacks of containers and boxes- perhaps if I can stay off the floor I'll stand a better chance of survival.

Footfall. Whirling I reach out with my hands and I grab the air behind me for once I get a good grip on it. My lab coat tugs twice being pulled out with the twin bullets being spat out of the silencer missing me by the narrowest of margins. Driving off the top of my stack I leap into the air and hope I'm going to have enough impetus to carry me to the next pile of boxes.

We don't, we crash right into it causing it to shift precipitously and the whole stack topples to the ground, I can hear cursing from below until one of the larger crates abruptly cuts it off. With one last shot the silenced pistol is knocked from her grasp, sparks come from a pack located on her belt and her camouflage glitches. Reaching up I tear the goggles from her face just before we come to a crumpling stop by slamming into the base of a large cement column.

Opening my eyes I see the assassin I had driven into the column her head slumped to the side, blood seeping from her ears. Searching through the debris I frantically search for her silenced pistol there was no way I was going to use mine and give away my position. On top of that I still had no idea how many more of these deadly combatants are out there in the vast space. Littering the floor are small canisters of pressurized oxygen glancing up at the ceiling I see the fire suppression sprinkler system.

The sound draws me back and I fling the container in front of me bringing up the silenced pistol I fire it left handed the bullet perforates the cylinder. Explosions are relatively rare and there wasn't one this time but the contents of the canister were violently expelled through the small hole, like a rocket thruster. Ahead of me I see the silenced gun as if it's floating on the air, suddenly it clatters to the floor and there's a crunch of sound as the canister slams right into the assassins windpipe. Her camouflage flickers off and I can see her fingers frantically scrabbling at her throat as she collapses to her knees and then falls onto her side, finally she stops.

"FREEZE!"

"I have a wife...a child..."

Silence yet I can feel the presence of the assassin right behind me.

"So did she. It was against the rules but she did it anyway. She never was one for rules."

For a few long moments there's silence, until I can't stand it any longer, sobbing I slowly raise my hands.

"...I just...I just...want to go home."

"I can't let you d-"

SPHHHTTTTTTTTTT!

Wetness slaps me across the left side of my face, it's warm and I know that it is blood. As the assassin crumples to the ground she pulls me down with her, both of us a tangled mess on the floor. Looking back to my left I see the assassin I thought had been crushed under the boxes slump forward her silenced pistol clattering to the floor. The sound of it seems to echo forever, I wait now for the sound of more pattering feet- the only sound though is that of water dripping.

There is nothing for me to do really, I've given a good go of it, my ankle just won't hold me up any longer over this rough terrain. Having followed the drip back I found that in fact led to an under ground stream, I should have listened to the cautious part of me. Now I was paying the price, yes I was cooler and was almost certainly well outside the boundaries of the facility, but my ankle was almost certainly broken. No choice remained but to get back into the water and hope I didn't smash into any underwater protuberances.

The current carried me away, I needed to sleep but I couldn't afford to, not here...now...any...other...time.

Gagging I woke with a start. Pushing myself up I squinted in the blazing sun. Muscles cramped especially in my lower back causing it to spasm, pain flared up my spine. Lowering myself flat I tried to relax and just ride it out, opening my eyes slowly I looked up and saw three hawks circling overhead- oh...no just one I realized as they resolved together. No way was I going to give up after making it this far, I needed to find water and something to eat- I needed to get to my family.

"Stay down Sir- help is on the way."

Turning my head sideways I see a young man, a woman in the background running towards him with bottled water and a blanket. Behind them both is their car idling away on the black tarmac of the State Route 9.

"...Thank you..."