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FINISHING HALF-LIFE IS JUST THE BEGINNING!

THE REPLAY
EXPERIENCE EXPERIMENT:
SHORT STORY EVENT NO.2

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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 decided to create a number of related activities. The Story events are part of those activities.

This is the second story competition. Its rules were as follows:

Since we are playing Opposing Force, I thought we should use the idea of a squad as the basis for the stories.

You certainly don't have to be Corporal Shephard, so your squad can consist of anybody you want it to.

You must write a story of between 500 and 2500 words

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

AND THE WINNER IS...

Following Orders by Andy Morris.

I really enjoyed this one. It was pretty short and kept me interested all the way through. The subject matter was also perfect, showing what might have been going through some of the Army grunts' minds.

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

Phillip Marlowe

Sunday 23rd September 2012

FOLLOWING ORDERS BY ANDY MORRIS

The elevator came to a stop with a soft thump. Captain Winters stood at the front, his four men standing at his back. He turned to face them, his back to the doors, bringing up his M4 and, his free hand pulling a magazine from an ammo pouch on his PCV.

"I know this sucks guys." he said, shaking his head "Orders are orders." He slammed the magazine into his carbine and yanked back the charging handle with an audible click. He turned to face the doors, sighed, and then reached for the button to open the doors.

The lobby had been transformed into a rallying point for the science team and security officers of the Black Mesa Research Facility. Every man present had a look on his face of someone who had seen true horror. As the scientists sat around on the floor, tending whatever wounds they had received, two guards watched the side hallways nervously, twitching with every monstrous sound which echoed through the darkness up ahead. Another guard patrolled the lobby, handing out cigarettes from a dogeared pack. Everybody took one, even the non-smokers.

The lift doors slid open, the squad of five grunts quickly pouring out into the lobby, the scientist and guards unsure of how to react. Some barely even looked up. One man nervously approached the squad, his hands semi-raised, a smile slowly creeping across his dirty, sweaty face. The marines raised their weapons in unison, and the man's expression changed, not to one of fear or sadness, but of disappointment. Winters hesitated for a moment, then opened fire.

The squads medic, a short man sporting large, thick rimmed glasses, pushed one of the corpses onto its back. The guards dead eyes staring up at him, he turned around to face Winters. "This is bullshit!" he protested, "We should be getting these people out of here."

"I understand how you feel Hastings" Winters said, not looking up from the log book he was flicking through "We're just following our orders here ok? I don't like it any more than you."

"No way man." Another grunt piped up, Lopez, a large man hauling an M249 around with him "I aint killing another unarmed civvie until I know what the fuck is going on here."

"We're looking for someone." Winters responded, "At let me tell you, if you hesitate when we come across this guy then you're as good as dead."

"Who?"

"The details are sketchy." Winters admitted, now pacing among the bodies, stroking his chin "Some science goon by the name of Freeman. We have reason to believe that he is involved in some kind of sabotage and now we need to clear out the facility and find him. I'll tell you something else. He sure as Hell doesn't have any reservations about killing. He's cleared out entire companies and even hit our armour and air support. We're dealing with some serious shit."

"I don't see how that justifies offing unarmed men."

Winter's was about to respond when he was cut short by a blood curdling scream from one of the side halls. "Report in!" he yelled, scanning the lobby and noticing he was one man down "What's going on. Where's Cooper!?" The screams intensified as they were joined by some form of beastly roar. The squad rushed to the hallway to see Cooper on the ground, his legs thrashing wildly while his upper body was engulfed within the maw of some hideous monster. It was backing down the hallway into the shadows, using its muscular legs to drag the still screaming Cooper along, it's tentacled face whipping and slashing at his body.

"Drop it!" Yelled Lopez, opening fire on the beast with his machine gun. A few rounds hit home, and it let out a high pitched scream, releasing Cooper from its grizzly mouth and vanishing into the shadows. Lopez gave chase, along with Jenkins, the fifth member of the squad.

"Lopez! Jenkins!" Winter called out, but the men had faded into the darkness. "Fuck!"

"Oh man, he's messed up sir." Hastings was kneeling beside Cooper's mangled and bloodied body. He was still alive, but fading quickly "I can't help him, not with my limited supplies."

"Alright, we'll move him to the elevator and get back up to the surface, see if we can call in a Medivac... shit." Winters hammered on the wall with his fist. "Jenkins has the radio. Gimme the flashlight?"

"Sir." Hastings pulled the flashlight from his vest and tossed it over. "I'm going to stay with Cooper, see if can at least ease his pain before we move him."

Hastings flicked on the light and proceeded into the gloomy labs up ahead. The

power had been knocked out for a few hours from the looks of things, as two freezers were surrounded by pools of water. He took a few careful steps, when a noise to his right caused him to turn quickly and he slipped fell, sending his M4 flying through the air and hitting the floor heavily somewhere in the blackness. He found himself on his back in puddle of freezing water looking up at the tile ceiling. He attempted to get to his feet, when he heard the noise again, and he stopped dead. It sounded like heavy footsteps on the tile floor not far from him, possibly Lopez and Jenkins coming back to regroup. However, there was only one set of footsteps, and they sounded slow and awkward. He turned over, pointing the light deeper into the hallway, to see a man in full combat gear, limping towards him, his M249 machine gun dragging along the floor behind him on a strap, a strange looking creature perched on his shoulders where his head should have been. It may have been Lopez, but it was something else now. The tattered remains of his gloves hung from his elongated and clawed hands. "You son of a bitch." Winters said, scrambling to his feet, slipping a couple more times as he panicked.

He eventually got to his feet, breaking into a jog back towards the lobby. Hastings, who was now standing over Cooper, looked up to see Winters running towards him. He raised his hand to wave, and as he did, got a glimpse of something in his peripheral vision. He turned to face whatever it was, only to be greeted by two powerful arcs of green energy, which struck him in the chest and sent him sailing into the wall behind him, his lifeless, smoking body hitting the floor a few feet from Cooper.

Winters drew his pistol and fired off two rounds, hitting the lightning monster square in the eye with both, and it slumped to the ground. He spun around and raised his gun again, firing the remaining five rounds into the chest of the former Lopez. It barely flinched, swiping the gun out of Winters' hands and lacerating his arm deeply. Winters screamed as he clutched his arm, the creature pausing and looking at him through its four beady little eyes. "Fuck you!" he yelled, drawing his knife with his good arm, only to be met with another swipe across his face and neck, and he dropped to the floor. He gasped for air, clutching at his throat while his remaining eye stayed fixed on the monster, which leaned over him, studying him again for a second, before bringing down both sets of claws for the kill.

-This is a page from a book by one David Tocundrius-

It was a hard decision to leave Ramirez behind, he was only hurt, but it was enough to hinder his movement. We could carry him with us but the squad leader said it would only slow us down. We were trained to never leave anyone behind, but also never endanger our group, and by carrying Ramirez around would slow us down and leave us as easy prey for those...things. We were trained hard for every situation, but not this. We can withstand every foe we may encounter, but not this. This is unlike anything any of us have ever witnessed. HQ said this mission would be a 'piece of cake' and that we would be back before my son's birthday. But they were wrong.

Things have gone really south since that scientist caused all this. Our mission was simple, find him and eliminate him. We stumbled across him once, he was fast and agile, I even got him once in the shoulder, but he had some kind of suit protecting him. He seemed to be in a hurry, we tried running after him, but it was no use. Just moments after that we got a radio call from HQ telling us to abandon mission and find a way out. Everybody was pulling out, but noone could leave, there were hostiles everywhere and no sign of the scientist. I'm starting to doubt he was a scientist at all. Maybe he was with the FBI or CIA or something.

I'm beginning to lose hope. Why bother escaping? We can't stop all of these things. They WILL reach the surface, and once they do, life will end. We have not heard from any of the other squads. We, Bravo 6, are the only ones left? If that's the case, what can we do? I am already going to hell so why keep the devil waiting? Our orders were to kill any scientist we encountered, especially that "special case". I walked into an office, there I met a scientist, his name was Jim and had 1 wife and 2 kids. I tried to talk the squad leader into letting him go but he would not listen. Luckily, when he walked in to finish it, the scientist had escaped

-A bit of the text is unreadable-

That last attack left me, Bonn and Twickston alive, but we could not move without loosing blood. This is the end for us. We sat there for hours and not a single sound was heard. Maybe they have left? We had learned that the scientist was called "The free man" and was going to stop all this, maybe that's what happened? Maybe he succeeded. Whatever happened, I don't think I'll be there to see it. This is David Tocundrius, Signing off.

-The origin of this text remains a mystery. The note was left on a Postal Office in New Jersey by a man in a blue suit. Further investigations will not be made by the orders of Wallace Breen.-

THE ONCOMING STORM BY RICHARD

The facility was found during the early hours, in the fog of night and snow. It was fine powder snow with a texture like sand that got everywhere, and chilled to the bone. The ghostly halos surrounding the tall mast lights in the distance gave the scene an eerie milky quality that raised the hairs on the nape of J. T. Martains's neck. Through the binoculars he spied those odd striding shapes again, Jenkins nudged his arm and whispered, "Imperial walkers or the yanks in with the martians!" The young Belgium engineer's smirk faded as she was dealt an icy glare. "Focus people, my guts telling me this'll go pear shaped in a heartbeat if we ain't on our toes!" Martains took in the engineer and her six fellows. "Remember scouting only, we need to see what that American base is up to". Peter's piped up from the rear. "It's one of them Mesa's, Blue Mesa according to Sara in records. And she said the yanks 'ave been in an uproar since it went off the grid". Martains ignored the gossip as he watched those striders on patrol, noting the time intervals on his mechanical watch! The mission brief had stated that no electronics of any description could be used or carried near the target. Or, as Jorgen had said, "Flintstones does COD!" not the best time for an outburst, the mission briefing room with all the top brass in attendance!

"Christ!" That came from Kurt, who had the steadiest eyes and was using the 20x50's. He was pointing to the east of the main building where a large group of; I strained my eyes as Kurt yelled out they were GI's; American troops, were heading towards the main gate. The front vehicles were lit up but behind them the APC,s were dark and swarming with men. Martains rubbed his tired eyes, straining to see, but all he got was the start of a migraine. Maya lobbed him some tablets. "Take it easy Jo' you're not a spring chicken any more" she said quietly as she lay beside him. Her arm over his shoulders suggested an easy familiarity, which was quite at odds with the steel in her voice as she spoke. "Commander Johan Thomas Martains this is your final mission, you dumb son of a bitch. No more!" he knew what she meant. "So how bad is it?" she continued more softly. He turned and looked towards her voice, but all he saw was a brilliant fractal lightning bolt, multicoloured and pulsating to the pain behind his eyes. "Bad" was all he said. He got up and nearly toppled over but Maya was quick with a supporting arm. "Kurt you have the con", she said keeping things light as she struggled to hold the commander upright. "Aye doctor Spock" Kurt beamed behind his field glasses.

A herbal tee and some meds had Martains back on his feet and Maya's heart rate back to normal. She loved the guy but he was a serious pain in the ass! So the commander took charge again and all was right in the world as the weather slowly deteriorated. Which proved quite lucky for the group, as a blizzard clamped down their visibility as the first sounds of automatic fire crackled in the distance. "Poor bastards!" someone yelled over the howling gale.

"Keep it down!" Martains barked. Straining ears picked up faint unearthly sounds as they hunkered down, weird electronic screams and the most terrifying weapon sounds Martains had ever heard. "No electronics, walking machines and now this. What did the brass know? And why were those poor dumb bastards going in without that intell?" he mused quietly. Then Kurt, who somehow could spot stuff in this snow-soup, said he saw a glowing blue lance, rip from one of the walking things and light the ground in the midst of the armoured vehicles. "They were scattered like toys" his voice full of awe, fell sombre as he recounted seeing bodies in the air. "Now ray guns!" Maya was in his ear beside him. "This is messed up Jo'. We're working in the dark on this one. It's turning into a fucking bug hunt!" he grinned at her "Aliens" reference, but something in his brain was crying out to be heard.

The rest of the night found the team lost in their own thoughts as they lie in their small hollows, trying to keep warm listening to the sounds of distant combat. Their orders were clear about zero combat! The consensus among the team was the notion that the battle was becoming one sided and far too much like an alien invasion 'B' movie to be comfortable with! As the battle sounds faded into the howling blizzards fury, Martains ordered everyone to kip down for the night, let the trip wires keep them safe. "Not even a bloody torch" he moaned trying to read the time. "Grandpa needs his glasses?" Maya interjected from the neighbouring hollow.

Nature, being the most callous of bitches, delivered the most beautiful sunrise to bathe a terrible scene at the compound gates. A nightmare of men and machines, torn and twisted, scattered with little regard for decency! Kurt was choked as he described the scene for, a very pale, Viktoriya to write down in her notepad. Martains told everyone to stay calm and pitch the camo netting before it got too light.

Later, Martains on watch was looking at one of the striders as Vlad passed him a steaming mug of tea. "Cheers" he muttered as he watched a bird dive at the things head. In the clearing snow he got a good look at this thing, dictating to Vlad as he sipped. "Head appears crustacean in appearance and colouring. Large weapon mounted and no sign of a visible canopy." Another sip, "Legs are three and jointed at the knee.....what?" the long pause caused Vlad to look up and into the Johan's wide eyes. "That bird flew at that thing and it ducked out the way and shook its head!" he looked a little strange, "I think this is a First Contact".

Light snow followed a stunning sunset and a green aurora display as the group discussed in muted tones the astonishing discovery of the living striders. Luna Jenkins was the most excited by the notion that we are not alone, but she was hardly surprised they were hostile. "They're always here to conquer us in those SciFi films." She said as the discussion finished. Martains calmed them down and collected the documentation. "Better get this stuff back home, the

sub'll be up in three hours so I think you two", he pointed at Jenkins and Vlad, "will be the volunteers. So stay frosty".

It was 04.00hrs when the watch pulled an exhausted Vlad under the netting, as Maya quickly took charge. Martains looked down at his 'volunteer' and into his smashed face as Maya torn open his thermals to reveal his black and blue torso. "He's been trampled, I've seen those injuries on a farm hand. But these marking look strange, not like any footprints I know", she scratched her head, "and them walking bastards are too big for this". Time passed too quickly and Maya, face strained, looked directly at Martains, "You got something new Jo'. And this poor bastards gone!" she covered him up. Her abruptness was her way of coping as was her insistence on preparing the body for recovery on her own. Martains said a few words as the watch nervously scanned for whatever had done that to poor Vlad.

"OI' Dracula finally laid to rest," said Maya's unsmiling face as she zipped the bodybag. Martains put an arm around her shoulder.

At 08.00hrs snow fell heavily enough for a closer look at the compound, but the new unknown foe was making the group jittery, silenced semi-autos waved erratically as the four stood below a window. The snowy gloom hid them from the three walking sentinels, who were more intent on scanning the skies, as they took turns looking inside as the others held them aloft. "It's Blue Mesa"! Kurt said, "43 levels and, I think accommodation for about 10,000 or so. Also I think this is the east gate". He added. "How big is this place?" Was Martains thinking as he looked in, to see the gates part for two striders. Men on foot followed in odd combat gear. The white ones with one red, round visor were obviously leaders, but they seemed wary of the three-legged things around them. They looked for all the world to be old broadcasting cameras on tripods! "Those are the bastards that did our mates," he muttered as he jumped down for the others to see.

Back at the dugout debriefing a plan was hatched to get the intell to the submarine. Martains led the group of four on skis during the twilight for the best chance of sighting any trouble. Kurt's keen eyes spotted two of those mini-striders heading towards the rendezvous spot, so the team split with Martains as bait. But it came to nothing as those two bastard things, still covered in blood and gore found the ice a little too thin and they went in screaming! "Fucking A!" screamed Martains, the icy Commander image slipping for a second. He watched them fade into the abyss.

Nervous scanning of this open area near the frozen sea kept everyone tense, desperate for the sign of that black monolith to appear from the depths. Kurt spotted two more hunters heading for their position. Weapons were cocked as Kurt called out their distance. They were moving too fast! A thunderous roar of smashing ice and water announced the arrival of the submarine not twenty metres from the group. Those murdering bastards arrived in time to meet the

Russian marines heavy machine guns! They were left smashed and bleeding on the ice as the huge black sail descended.

Ten minutes later around the Captain's table in the warm wood-panelled room, toasts were given as the old Russian boat groaned under the ice. It was heading out to an area for a safe communication to HQ and to receive the rest of the orders. The reply was as Martains team expected of military minds. Command wanted a Strider and one of those Hunters. Including all the tech they could recover. Diplomacy had seen sense and now the Americans were onboard and they were keen for payback! They had lost men trying to take back their base and now they wanted blood.

Their voyage to rendezvous with the "USS Enterprise" was to include Martains biggest surprise. He was sharing the Exo's room when he saw Viktoriya walk passed in a pink bathing suit carrying a towel, "Care for a dip?" she asked him. One, he had never seen so much of her! And two, there was a swimming pool? He sat, in a Russian Nuclear Missile submarine, at -100 metres in his shorts watching his tech engineer frolic in the swimming pool with some of the crew; in the poolroom! "Russians!" he smiled.

Twelve days later found him and the American Commander leading a squad of U.S. and Russian marines as they met up with the scout party and filled them in on the new mission. They had already caught three 'hunters' and got one alive for study just after surfacing, hence the missing Soviet Commander. He got kicked by a hunter and had a lump the size of a fist on his forehead! Martains split everyone for their separate assignments and broke camp left to await the mission signal. Except for one unlucky marine who tripped on a tripwire and fractured his wrist! He was not a happy bunny!

The mission signal came at 08.00hrs, a deep resonate "Whump" shook the ground followed by a series of mini-earthquakes. "That was the 'Blue Mesa' facility being remote detonated from the White House", said the American commander. "No filthy alien horde messes with Uncle Sam's toys", he laughed. "Now let's move out".

The base was taken in just seven minutes! "Our Seven-Minute War!" declared the commander in his most gun-ho 'Americanese'! He roared with laughter and triumph, but that was the last laugh as they say. There were tears in many eyes at the main gate. The light snow had dusted the scene but that much horror was hard to cover!

Martains bit his lip hard as he saw tough Marines fall to their knees.

The burial detail was grim. Martains group took over the alien recovery to allow the marines to recover their fallen comrades. Fifty marines were recovered with twenty-two remaining MIA! There was joy in this task when, Martains's team proudly marched out twelve beaming American marines who

had been held in the one of the out buildings. A huge roar welcomed them to the group!

The mission was deemed a success, with seven striders and four hunters recovered along with forty-seven alien combatants, all dead.

J. T. Martains met up with his former comrades for a drink on a bright crisp winter's day in 2003 near Moscow to toast the fallen, but not the future. He had learned much about the "Black Mesa Incident" and what it could mean for all. His contacts in the secret services of a few countries had dire warnings of things to come. Martains quit the service due to medical grounds, but that was not the real reason and left for the Russian Urals. Maya joined him a few months later.

Much later on a stormy November in Moscow they met their former comrades for a final time to discuss their collective discoveries. Kurt explained that his sister's fiancée had been at "Black Mesa" and had got out with important documentation predicting interdimensional portals to storm around the world with possible alien invasion a real threat! But it did not surprise this group! "Why isn't she here?" Maya asked, "They're in hiding from the MIB!" Kurt replied. It was their code for the various odd governments 'spooks' they kept bumping up against! The Martains's outlined their plan to the group and oaths were given and received by all present. "A toast to our survival and I will see you all in the spring at Serenity", glasses clinked and the party began.

An icy spring morning found the convoy at the city outskirts. A heavily armed guy in a camouflaged hazard suit greeted them. "The Martains's party I presume. Follow me and keep those masks on," he said in perfect ex-KGB English! They passed a heavily weathered Ferris wheel, past empty flats with trees sprouting from unused parking areas and along dirty cracked roads. At one large block a camouflaged guy waved the convoy passed heavy rust-painted, but new gates and down they drove, through decontamination and another four levels. Eventually at the thick main entrance doors, a smiling Maya, arms wide, greeted them. "Welcome to Serenity Base, Pripjat!"