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Finishing Half-Life is just the beginning!

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## UNTOLD STORIES Fan Fiction Event

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### Contents

|                                              |           |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Introduction</b>                          | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Pick Up That Can!</b>                     | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Were You The Only Ones On That train?</b> | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>All in One and One in All</b>             | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Tunnel</b>                                | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Steve Jobs</b>                            | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Arrival</b>                               | <b>12</b> |
| <b>Repressed Memories</b>                    | <b>15</b> |
| <b>Prospero</b>                              | <b>17</b> |
| <b>The Oasis Incident</b>                    | <b>20</b> |
| <b>Fragments</b>                             | <b>23</b> |
| <b>Time, Dr. Breen?</b>                      | <b>25</b> |

# Introduction

After the success of the previous Fan Fiction event, another seemed inevitable and here it is.

The challenge was to take a supporting character from HL2 and write a story about them. The word limit was 1500.

There were two prizes: one for my favourite and one for the readers favourite. If they were the same, then the second reader favourite would get the prize. The prizes were random Steam games.

At the time of publishing this PDF, no prizes had been allocated. You can see the results, once they are published, here:

<https://www.runthinkshootlive.com/posts/untold-stories-fan-fiction-event/>

I have not read them yet, so I may release a version 2 of this PDF with updated formatting. There is also one that is currently untitled. The author has not replied to my request at the time of publication.

The stories are listed in submission order.

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

Phillip - June 2018

# Pick Up That Can!

"I was at Black Mesa you know" Officer 45/9 stopped and turned around. "Before the Combine I was a baker." The new officer 345/1 nodded. "I remember donuts were good with coffee." 45/9 put his hands on his hips. "Dispatch... patrol nine sector four reporting no rebel activity..." He pointed to a bar with four APC's parked outside as the Overwatch's female announcer confirmed his message. "That's a sexy voice!"

245/1 looked at his feet. "Sex... sexy?" The old officer laughed. "New guys are so wiped! Never mind son, keep yer head done and you can get some nice little rewards... But you gotta have some good quotas!" He opened the café door.

"What is it the human is wants?" The collared Vortigaunt bowed as they looked for a booth. "Table four, two coffees and keep'm coming, doughnuts too freak!"

"Geez forty-five you're still pink!" 345/1 put his white face mask on the wall receptacle as he looked at his training partner's white, cracked parchment like skin and deep red eyes as he too placed his mask into the wall unit. That face smiled showing rotting black teeth. "Ah good the doughnuts are here!" he kicked the young vortigaunt hard across the floor as other officers laughed, the younger ones merely watched. "Nothing more disgusting than the oppressed!"

The sound of a speeding car outside saw the older officer grab his mask and dive under the small booth's table. "Down kid!" He drew his piston as 345/1 activated his stun baton. He saw the green satchel flying through the busted window and ducked down as detonated blasting the café with shards of sharp metal! The sound of gunfire was heard as the surviving officers fired back at the fleeing vehicle!

The bar was a bloodied mess; the long tones of dying civil protection personnel could be heard over the radios of the survivors as they picked their way to the exit. Dispatch was all over this one and it looked serious enough to call in the heavies!

Officer 45/1 stood rigid with his back against the wall as three Overwatch Elite soldiers marched past him heading in the direction of that rebels vehicle. Those red-eyed white horrors scared the older officer as his younger recruit just 'hellowed' them with a salute. But even he froze when the two Hunters ambled past on their three legs, looking around and making a shrill noise that made his spine tingle!

"Glad they're on our side!" 345/1 said with a smile." 45/9 smirked behind his mask. The sugar rush on young recruits was not unlike alcohol! "Get yourself masked son 'fore one on them bastard red snowmen see yah!"

They walked out into the street and began their new patrol route like nothing had happened. The old officer taped the young recruit with his baton. "Watch this son." He taped a soggy ration cup on the floor from an overfilled bin and pointed to a women puking on the pavement. "Hey you citizen pick that up! Littering's a serious crime."

The woman ambled over terrified as 45/9 drew his baton. "Pick it up citizen!" As she bent down he stung his baton in a smooth arc landing it hard against her back as she crumbled crying out! 345/1 took the hint, turning off his baton as he went in hard. "That's it son save the head till last!" The woman continued screaming and crying as her blood splattered their uniforms.

The frightened crowd watching parted as a man wearing the symbol of rebellion fired from a captured Combine MP7. 45/9 turned as his white head exploded as the doctored rounds tore into his armour shredding it along with his internals. He fell into an expanding pool of his own blood! 345/1 dropped his baton and ran for the small alleyway under a hail of gunfire!

Two rebel medics lifted the woman from the ground as soldiers searched the deep CP officer taking baton batteries and his pistol. They cheered as the soldier held up passkeys! 345/1 watched from the dark room he was hiding in, his radio off for fear of capture. He froze as two rebels passed him in the dark. "Bastards run off? When did they start running?" The other rebel snarled. "Probably a newbie. So terrified those vermin

join the Combine for better rations or just too chicken shit to live... worse than those alien bastards!"

45/9 eventually moved from his hiding spot under the cover of darkness, reactivated his radio and signed in. "Hold current position 345/0 an APC will be at your local in five minutes." 345/0 sat down with a sigh. Demoted already and why did they know where he was? He looked at the young rebel with a shotgun and felt something hard hit his chest!

He was in his security room in Black Mesa sheltering two wounded soldiers from some terrifying monsters wanders the corridor outside his armoured window. His name was Pete, Peter? He was a security officer with a young wife and baby in the local town.

He was on the surface and the tension was high as he stood with the assembled scientists and soldiers. "We're at war people! It's a goddamn actual alien invasion. I don't know what you guys were doing in there." He pointed to silo door, recently blasted open and now hastily blocked with cargo containers and sentry guns! "But we've opened Pandora's box! Even my own guys were ordered to kill everything in there before sanity reigned and now I hear about things called portal storms; holes in the high atmosphere disgorging alien machines bent on our eradication!" He crossed himself. "But we've got god and righteousness on our side, and with his guiding hand we'll win, send those devils to hell!"

Pete opened his eyes as the Combine medic refitted his mask. "345 your injury was minor. Rejoin your sector watch." He got off the table collected his weapon and supplies and walked out of the main door to the sunny street. "Dispatch to officer 345 proceed to..."

*I was at Black Mesa and now I became a combine, I joined the enemy after we lost in a matter of a day, no less than that! Who was I again?* 345 reduced to his lowest rank walked up the steps of City 17's main transport hub, the city-17 train station to assume his guard position. Was there anything lower than a gate guard with a dustbin for company?

Four hours he had watched two people walk nervously towards him and into the station. One had even left a can on the floor, I mean the bin, they walked right past it and they could not be bothered to just hold it for a second longer? 345 sighed heavily. *Fourteen more hours before shift change...* The next civilian to face him would get some rough combine justice for sure!

The man walking up rather arrogantly with his goatee beard and retro glasses seemed to annoy 345 on sight. Had he seen him before? Whoever he was he was going to be pranked! 345 threw a can on the floor.

"Pick up the can" The man stopped and looked at the can before he picked it up. "Now put it in the trash can!" *I'll wipe that arrogant smile off that human face with a stun charge, wham, bam thank you maam! Demote me!*

"What!" The man stood his ground as sticky wet soda dripped from the Civil Protection officer's facemask! Incensed 345 charged his baton and swung at the man's head with a clang! "WTF" The man stepped back as his crowbar swung again relieving the officer of his baton and then again taking his facemask off! The man dropped his crowbar and walked off as 345 sat on the floor incredulous. "WTF? You cheat!"

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Submitted by Rikersbeard

# Were You The Only Ones On That train?

Overwatch stopped our train in the woods and took my husband for questioning. They said he'd be on the next train. I'm not sure when that was. They're being nice, though, letting me wait for him.

But then suddenly, a piece of humanoid garbage appeared from the ground, it was a 1.8 m humanoid, it was the only unbelievable Turbo Philippines, a failed experiment from Chernobyl that Ukrainian scientists tried to stop but it was too late and yes this humanoid was the cause of the Chernobyl incident from 1986. And it was unbelievable that i saw, the monster was actually real.

So this monster after he appeared, he looked so angry, so angry that he began to attack the Overwatch Soldiers, the overwatch soldiers said "WE GOT HOSTILES!" and the overwatch soldiers began to shoot at the monster, but like it says in my mythology book: "This creature is immune bullets and when a bullet hit him, it gets more angrier" so basically the soldiers made the monster more angrier, at a extreme point where he killed almost all of the soldiers, i heard one of them saying: "SHIT! WE NEED SUPPORT" and another said "CALLING SUPPORT!", it was a catastrophe... I saw massive blood all in the entire ground and after that, a lot of APCs came to kill this monster, but, they made a mistake, according to my mythology book the creature will expand his size when gets hit by a rocket. Now this monster was 30 meters big, the creature got so mad that eventually ended up destroying all of the APCs that the combine got available, the combine scared, made a call to the Earth Administrator, Wallace Breen, one of them said "MY LORD! THERE IS A MONSTER IN THE WOODS THAT IS KILLING ALL OF US WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING!" so then after like 30 minutes 1 thousand striders and hunter choppers came to destroy this monster, but..., they failed... I was so amazed that the combine got defeated by a 30 meter monster garbage, since there was no combine in the woods, i took my husband so he could escaped. but unfortunately.. the monster got us, and he eated us. I am not sure what happened next but i believe the monster went to City 17 to eat more people and buildings because i saw that people were coming to the monster's stomach.

Like 3 hours later... all of us: my husband, the citizens, the combine and some massive pieces of structure went to the monster's anus and like 30 minutes later, the monster took a massive shit of 20 meters high and 50 meters wide. The monster was screaming because it was very difficult for the monster to poop, but he successfully pooped in the center of city 17 and we eventually got free. We just needed to wait until someone rescued us. The shit was so stinky. but after 5 hours later, the shit disintegrated so much that it disappeared. We were so happy to be free from this stinky shit. and the monster, well... i honestly don't know, he just went away. But honestly i didn't care so much. My husband told me "Oh baby i am so happy to be free, so much that i want to kiss ya", and i said, "yeah... let's kiss my dear" and we kissed for 4 hours straight.

THE END

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Submitted by Flavio Mauri

# All in One and One in All

Vortigese echoed from within the small, cramped room. A bottle shattered against the wall behind the Vortigaunt, red wine dripping down the already grimy wall of the kitchen. The two Vortigaunts stood there, each of their four eyes staring past the Vortessence. They were there and then in that very moment, ignoring the mutual cry of ease and calm from beyond the kitchen, beyond the lab, beyond the very bounds and borders of City 17. Even those who remained hidden among the bowels of The Border world, those who existed beyond, their voices ignored and silenced by each Vortigaunt. The problem concerned no-one and everyone from within the lab, for this error could destroy the very foundation in which this rebellion was built. This was a grave error that couldn't be ignored or forgiven by the Vortigaunt known by the humans as "Jaa'mi".

"You have tainted the remains of an already ill-fated parasite! Accursed are the humans that consume this repellent fare!" Raa'mzay shouted from his L-shaped prep table. Jaa'mi had nowhere to cower. The table's instruments were placed, perhaps by fate, so that Jaa'mi's back faced Raa'mzay, a clear target if their anger got the better of them, and it never helped them as they cooked.

"Calm yourself! There is no distance between us!" Jaa'mi gutturally tried to calm them.

"How often have we sipped our yolk, only to find it choking us again?" Raa'mzay demanded. Jaa'mi kept to their table, stirring the sauce from within their pot.

"Taaar..." growled Raa'mzay, moving away from their area to the fridge. Withdrawing a bottle of wine, regretting their previous actions. A bottle of wine was rare in these parts of the canals, and to waste it in anger was a vain mistake. The kitchen fell silent, aside from the sizzle of the burner and the echo of the elevator shaft. They grabbed another Headcrab carcass from within and returned to their station. The cleaver cut through the joints of the parasite after many whacks. A bowl of sauce made from whatever they could find in the pantry sat near the new bottle. Raa'mzay's head hadn't moved from their work, not even bothering to acknowledge the passengers of the elevator that passed by their section.

Jaa'mi slurped from their ladle, it wasn't their best work, but they were satisfied with it. The echoes of lightning from the floor bellow followed the dimming of the lights from within the kitchen. Jaa'mi scanned the room for the location, finally staring past the tiled floor to their ally below.

"The Vortessence sees our kin powering the Eli Vance's lab. The Freeman has arrived." Jaa'mi warned Raa'mzay.

"Indeed" Raa'mzay hissed. The rhythmic thumping of the cleaver slowly stopped. Raa'mzay found themselves staring at the crab's legs. They knew what must be said for the actions that had been committed.

"We accept your apology and agree with what must be done." Jaa'mi spoke.

"We must fabricate an acceptable achievement for The Freeman and Eli Vance. A joyous occasion should not be sustained by this rummage..." Raa'mzay admitted, waving a claw over the table. The two began to work with one another, trying combinations and picking the best for their creation. Cutting and dicing the parasite's flesh, combining it into a pot with veggies and seasonings that would result in amalgamation of tastes for the humans. Only one step was left, but to do this would require all their concentration.

"We must join in union, our energy to craft the perfect...nuriousment." Raa'mzay said, looking over the tightly, foil wrapped pan.

"Yes... a reflection on Human Kinship... to warm and sooth the being." Jaa'mi normally wouldn't feed into Raa'mzay's ego but knew this dish would redeem themselves in Raa'mzay's eyes.

"Let us begin..." The two stood on each side of the pan, eyes closed, and hands folded in praying hands. They began their guttural chants, green energy beginning to emit from within their claws as the pan began to shutter.

"FOCUS..." Raa'mzay shouted over the energy that pooled around the pan, as it levitated in front of them. Their monotone, guttural chants echoed off the walls of the room. It almost felt like they were reverberating back into the pan, enhancing the flavor of the dish from within. Raa'mzay opened his eye, in unison with Jaa'mi as they both marveled at the glowing pan. Raa'mzay stared into Jaa'mi's eye, sharing a mutual moment of accomplishment and pride with one another. The focus had shut them off from the entire base, shutting down the voices from beyond. In focusing on the pan, they were unable to heed warnings of what was about to transpire.

The elevator shaft echoed with mechanical, monotonous voices and the clicks of the Combine regulation MP7. The Shu'ulathoi's minions had gathered on the elevator, creating a path of blood and bullets from above to reach it. As the elevator found it's way past their floor again, the rhythmic pings and piercing pain of bullets were a shared feeling between the two Vortigaunts. The energy surrounding the pain brightened from the catalyst of energy, caused by the wounds. The pan had vanished out of being, sucked into a portal, as Jaa'mi slumped against the prep table. As the elevator passed, and so with it the danger, Raa'mzay crawled over to Jaa'mi's motionless body.

*"A-all...in one...and o-one...in all..."*

\*\*\*

Doctor Magnusson made his way towards the kitchen area, but was stopped in a hurry by a Rebel, much younger than him but still older than most stationed at the missile silo.

"Sir, you need to get to the transmission room immediately! Black Mesa East has went dark!" She sounded worried.

"Why must you annoy me with such trivial matters? Why, Eli must have overloaded that damned lab's electricity again! Always fiddling with that small Anti-Mass Spectr- oh why am I even bothering trying to explain it to you? Just go back and ask if it's urgent!" After he had finished barking at her, he pushed past her and made his way down the concrete halls of the base. After typing in the code to the huge, locked doorway he stepped in and searched the fridge.

"Where did it...no, no, no! Who took it? Why must I be cursed with such obstacles in the way of my genius!?!?" he screamed in anguish. A bright green flash threw him back against a wall with no warning and almost knocked him unconscious. Standing back up he found himself staring at a steaming pan, emitting an ominous, green glow. He moved towards the table it sat upon, stopped to grab a fork for self-defense, and moved forward. He lifted the lid off the pan, as it dropped on the counter. Magnusson covering his own mouth in shock. A perfect, flawless casserole sat before him and only him.

He looked around, making sure nobody was around to cease it and drew his fork into the crust of the dish. Cutting a sizable chunk into the casserole, he lifted it to his gaping mouth, took the bite in and...

"PAH! How terrible!" he spat out the creation. Nowhere near to the glorious taste of a magnificent MICROWAVE casserole! The Rebel from before came in through the ascending door, panting.

"Sir! Eli Vance--"

"Yes, I agree. I should contact him and discuss what monstrosity this casserole is! Enjoy that filth if you want, I could care less!" He stormed past her once again, going to attend to the matter at hand. She walked over and scoped some out on her finger, testing the dish.

"Eh, could use some salt."

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Submitted by CherylBomb

# Tunnel

REPORT 20xx-xx-05 – 2307 HOURS

ANTICITIZEN ONE HAS LEFT BLACK MESA EAST WITH UNKNOWN DESTINATION – INVESTIGATION OF SEIZED RESISTANCE COMPOUND SUGGESTS THE TARGET TO HAVE MOVED TOWARDS SITE #2256 – TARGET IS DUE TO REACH SETTLEMENT KNOWN AS 'SHOREPOINT' IN 0936 HOURS – STRIKE FORCE IS TO BE DISPATCHED TO PREPARE ANTICITIZEN ONE'S ARREST

They said Freeman was coming. Leon had told them the news just a few hours ago, when the early shift began. Apparently, he'd heard it right from the source during his weekly report to Miss Vance.

Freeman was coming, Winston thought while absent-mindedly cradling his gun. Finally, a light at the end of the tunnel. Finally, after twenty years' worth of back and forth, of raids on Combine patrols and subsequent Combine attacks on resistance outposts, the whole dam misery was coming to an end.

The One Free Man, they called him. The days of the Combine were numbered, Leon had said. Freeman would liberate them, once and for all. Winston was curious how one man would accomplish that, but Leon had said he would, and Winston believed Leon. Leon was usually right about most things.

REPORT 20xx-xx-06 – 0813 HOURS

ANTICITIZEN ONE HAS BEEN SPOTTED LEAVING SITE #2256 – ALL UNITS ARE TO ENGAGE THE TARGET UPON SIGHT – UNIT #0415 HAS FAILED TO REPORT FOR DUTY AFTER MAKING CONTACT WITH THE TARGET – STRIKE FORCE #1138 IS TO ANNIHILATE THE SETTLEMENT KNOWN AS 'SHOREPOINT' IN DUE TIME TO BRING IN ANTICITIZEN ONE

Winston's train of thought abruptly stopped the second the first shot interrupted the silence. And just like that, everything went pear-shaped.

The bullet hit the wall right next to him, ricocheting off into nowhere, and he pulled the trigger of his weapon, blindly firing into the vague direction of the attackers while frantically screaming for Daniel to assist him. Bullets were flung at half a dozen Overwatch troopers at 857 rounds per minute as Daniel, too, opened fire. Out of the corner of his eye, Winston saw more soldiers closing in on the base while he retreated into the base, emptying bursts of ammo into the morning air until his gun uselessly clicked in his hand.

Even without him screaming bloody murder, Gwen, Jacob and Leon had already worked out what was happening. Winston quickly discarded the empty magazine and grabbed a new one while Jacob and Gwen took position on both sides of the entrance before simultaneously turning round the corner with their weapons drawn.

They were met with a wall of bullets.

REPORT 20xx-xx-06 – 0831 HOURS

'SHOREPOINT' RAID IN PROGRESS – ENEMY CASUALTIES 1, STRIKE FORCE CASUALTIES 0 – GROUND FORCES HAVE ENTERED THE MAIN BUILDING – ANTICITIZEN ONE DUE TO ARRIVE IN 0012 HOURS

Jacob didn't scream. It was the most eerie thing Winston had ever seen. One moment, Jacob fired his shotgun in the face of a soldier, the next, he was on the floor, more blood flowing out of his chest than there should even be in a human body.



Leon cried out and filled the enemy trooper's head with lead for good before quickly scooping up his comrade and half-carrying, half-dragging him into the back towards the least filthy corner of the back room, the corner they had dubbed the infirmary a while ago.

Winston had never thought they'd need an infirmary for real.

There was gunfire outside and he wondered if Daniel was even still alive.

Suddenly, the characteristic THUMP THUMP THUMP of the Overwatch pulse rifles fell silent and Winston wondered if that means that Daniel was dead or if something had interrupted the attackers' bloody work.

He stopped caring when something hit him in the chest and suddenly there was pain everywhere and he couldn't breathe anymore and when had he gotten blood all over his hands?

REPORT – 20xx-xx-06 – 0845 HOURS

RADIO CONTACT WITH STRIKE FORCE #1138 LOST – LAST REPORT CONFIRMS ANTICITIZEN ONE SIGHTED AND ENGAGED – STATUS OF REMAINING RESISTANCE COMBATANTS UNKNOWN – ENEMY CASUALTIES 2, PRESUMED STRIKE FORCE CASUALTIES 10 – GROUND AND AIR UNITS ARE TO BE DISPATCHED TO KNOWN ANTICIVIL SETTLEMENTS IN THE AREA

They had said Freeman was coming and come he had. They had finally reached the light at the end of the tunnel and left the darkness behind. Through the blur of shock and pain and the sound of voices calling his name, Winston thought he'd seen an orange figure walk by, stopping for a second to look down at him before following somebody who led Freeman away from him.

Someone was crying and then there were hands, carrying him away and taking off his clothes and somebody called for a medic over and over again and at some point his vision became even more blurry.

The Freeman had come, but sometimes, the light at the end of the tunnel turned out to be a train coming at you.

Winston's world went black.

---

Submitted by HashtagMC

# Steve Jobs

Click. You depress the transmission button. I'm wondering if you'll go through with it, thinking about what the CP official said to you earlier.

He was dressed in the old Civil Protection uniform, back before they introduced the full face masks.

Full of kind words & masked threats. Good cop & bad all-in-one. What was it he said? "...won't make it any more painful... than it has to be."

You were quiet. I don't think he knew who you were. How high up the ladder you went. I suppose the lab equipment was a dead give-away. We should have hidden it better. In hindsight.

2021

Looking back, I think it was always him. Eli. Maybe you'd always longed for him the way I so, so badly longed for you. Before you there was nothing. I'd met girls, for sure, and I imagine some of them might have liked me. I'd always thought I was damaged somehow. Like the Enemy's suppression field had made me more than just sterile; that it had purged me of all desire. Made me into a thing. A pet.

One young lady, whose name I can't even recall had once asked me to hold her. I remember we in a shelter overlooking the bay. There was no light. We were being shelled.

She was scared. Of course. But I could tell she was drawn to me. Nervous in a way different to the existential terror we all experienced daily. She was burrowing into my neck. Kissed me on the cheek. I knew what she'd wanted. I'd tried to want the same thing.

Then.

When I met you it was a revelation. Every flutter, every suppressed feeling I'd ever tried to coax out in my eighteen years alive burst into existence that moment. You were beautiful. Unlike anyone I'd ever met. Delicate, but permanent. I even grew to love those polo-neck jumpers you wore all the time. Like a voluptuous Steve Jobs. None of the other girls appeared nearly as comfortable in their own skin as you did. Do you remember? You used to talk about all the paths in life you hadn't taken. Everything your mentors Colette & Regina had taught you. You taught me. You showed me beautiful things that didn't seem to belong to this foetid world we were left to hide inside.

The other girls said you were aloof. They used words like: Unkind; Conceited. That couldn't be further from the truth. I know you. You don't judge anyone, even when they judge you. What those girls mistook for arrogance and vanity was clarity and vision. You were so excited for what was coming.

\*

The Enemy had hardened us all. We'd all done things we hadn't thought ourselves capable. We were ready to face any threat or mission. Oppression doesn't sap your will to fight. It takes away your will to move on. Will to rebuild. To imagine a future any different than this one. If they'd sent us on a suicide mission, we'd be there in a shot. Talk about the possibilities of ending this war and nobody wanted to hear it.

Impossible!

I think we were all guilty of seeing our Enemy as omnipotent. A merciless, unstoppable force.

Not something to be overcome. Or dare I even say it, defeated. But you NEVER thought like that. This was a test. Your opportunity to solve the problem of the Combine.

2024

"What's the shortest distance between two points?"

"A straight - "

"No no no!" you cut in.

"Quantum, uh, quantum entanglement?"

You nod. I remember thinking how brilliant you were. How this would change the war.

Now.

I should have guessed when you accepted the tracking device. I figured you'd tape it to a seagull or something; get D0g to dispose of it for you. Lead them subtly off the scent.

You'd kept eyeing your notes. The computer. You must've known they'd come back for you and the research if you didn't comply. If you didn't give them something substantial.

Then he left you with a channel 16 pin-code. That CP officer. I'd peeked out of a greasy window as those Gestapo thugs walked away and got back into their APC, not realizing how much they'd rattled you.

Your pretty, long, slender fingers. The orange keyboard.

43.317° N O R T H space L A T I T U D E; 1 3 2. 3 5 0 ° E A S T space L O N G I T U D E.

###

My blood freezes as you type. This isn't a convincing lie. This is our primary military base.

"This has to look real."

"W-why?" I stammer.

"It's the only way to stall them. If they realize how far along our tech is they'll change tactics and we'll be fighting this war for another hundred years! This isn't an enemy we take out with sticks & guns."

No.

"Only with science..."

I'm letting you talk me into complicity in our brothers' and sisters' death sentence. I'll comply. I'll go along with it. This is the only way.

---

Submitted by Malcolm Warren Cheaple

# Arrival

"Did you hear?" The shabby resistance fighter dropped his finished cigarette to the ground and mashed it with his boot. Tom Piggleston, "Piggy" to his colleagues brushed dirt from his resistance insignia. Resistance... What do we resist? He laughed startling Mazzy! We resisted, are resisting nothing!

"Hear what Mazzy?" He tried to sound interested as they walked down a dirty corridor. Can't people even bother to clean up around themselves anymore? The woman smiled with more energy than that suppression field normally allowed; She thought this to be big! He sat beside her in the small briefing room. "Okay even I'm excited, what is it?" Tom frowned. "Didn't that idiot cause all this working for that mysterious man-in-black?" Mazzy's smile faded back to her usual, permanent frown. "Sorry I forgot you was there."

Sergeant Piggleston was due to head out to Black Mesa when his unit was suddenly ordered back on route in their Ospreys. He was already silently questioning his orders to terminate all assets in the facility when a bright flash on the horizon filled his cabin! "They nuked Black Mesa! Said something about... about aliens?" Tom looked across to the LT, whose face was serious but showing no hint of surprise! "Sergeant we're heading back to base all leave cancelled for the foreseeable future... If we have one!"

Tom looked down at Mazzy. "Yeah twenty odd years later and I'm resisting those we couldn't resist back then! That's irony Maz!" He found a smirk on his face. "Seven hour war? More like ten minutes for the division I was in! Monsters falling from a hole in our own skies, what could we do?"

The old man walked in and locked the door as one more person took his seat. "Today we have a very VIP entering our city and judging by the rumour mill I hardly need to mention who!" Three of those attending cheered. "Thank you for that enthusiasm." He pointed to the board as he detached the cloth.

"This is a layout of City 17's main rail terminus. You five will be stationed around the concourse, seated, standing and moaning like locals as our man, in disguise of course." I hope! "He has been told to approach certain people and ask random things to assess his level of safety as he navigates his way to the Nova Prospekt gate."

"Mazzy will meet him as a woman asking those leaving the trains about her missing husband. The exit has a revolving gate and when he turns to you on exiting it you must mention 'overwatch' in your cover story if you sense trouble." Mazzy nodded and sat back down.

"Martin you must be in place to deliver those messages on the sheet in your hand. The state of the 'water' to drink or not will determine whether he advances or retreats quietly but as you know he is prone to stirring up trouble!" Martin nodded. "So I gotta make sure Civil Protection stays off my ass for how long?" The old man smiled. "From dawn onwards, sorry but his arrival time is necessarily left up to him, just on the day that's all." Martin sat with a groan, it sounded dangerous!

Mark Smith nodded as he heard his assignment. "They took your suitcase or where's your suitcase? I sit all day as those CP goons eye my soft head swinging their stun battens and that's it?" Mark Smith was a scared man, then who wasn't in these harsh times? But he was a damaged man, scarred and scared witless. He looked around the room as he sat down.

"Mac and Geoff, you'll be on the train with our man. He's unarmed but you'll be carrying suitcases with autos and grenades, hopefully the new shielding from Doc Kleiner will fool their sensors, but just make sure you get off first and not involve our guy if the worst happens." Mac laughed. "Got it Boss!"

Geoff scratched his head something was off! "So we dump the cases and then follow him to the Nova Prospekt gate or try to go through with them?"

Only Geoff and Mac remained in the room when the others were dismissed. "That's the plan he will be following but we have it on good authority that Civil Protection is trying to trap him. If our man boards that train we're screwed gentlemen!" The two men shrugged their shoulders. "Is there a but?"

The old man grinned tapping his pipe on the desk and then refilling it. "Home grown you know. The 'but' is a man we have in the Civil Protection guarding that stations interrogation cells. He's positioned to intercept our man once we confirm or deny the danger at that Nova gate."

The morning of the mission was tense but Geoff and Mac met the train three stops before City 17's main terminal and shared a carriage with the infamous Gordon Freeman and as ordered kept interaction to a minimum. He was only to know who they were if he needed them.

They departed first and quickly stashed their weapons cases unseen as Gordon followed some way behind. As suspected he was stopped at the closed Nova Prospekt gate and directed to an interrogation rooms the Civil Protection goons used! Geoff and Mac watched from the fence as Combine soldiers moved them and the other civilians on.

Luckily for Freeman he was directed to an interrogation cell staffed today by one Barney Calhoun for a reunion! Gordon smiled. Who the hell was this guy? Barney from Black Mesa who owed him a beer? And now Doctor Kleiner, his old boss! Gordon smiled and played along.

Out on the station concourse Mazzy was dragged unconscious between two CP officers heading for the interrogation rooms as a shabbily dressed Mark Smith pointed at the direction Gordon Freeman had taken.

Geoff appeared from a storeroom with his automatic machine gun on his hip dropping the running officers as Mac threw grenades into the squads of Overwatch soldiers filing into the station! Freeman had escaped with seconds to spare as a vicious firefight ensued!

"Barney, Barney Calhoun?" Mac wrapped a bandage around the old mans ripped thigh. "He got out with us but... Mark Smith... he was with the CP's giving them directions!" Geoff spat on the floor. "He turned us in the scared little..." A manhack exploded above his head as Mazzy's sister reloaded her shotgun. "He sold us all out cos he was frightened. I hope to hell that one day that white masked freak who feels my buckshot will reveal the tatters of his traitorous face!"

Geoff and Mac are still fighting in a new resistance group after their own was left in pieces. They are leaders now, experienced fighters wanted by the Combine at any cost. They took out an Advisor in one of the resistance's few successful attacks on these powerful creatures, the Combine's leadership! Even the great Gordon Freeman only injured one with Alyx Vance's help, but that had a huge cost!

Mark Smith joined the Civil Protection and sometime later approached Barney Calhoun with vital Combine movement plans. He was trying to atone for his treachery and cowardice in the only way he could.

Although never truly trusted he did good work for the resistance before he was cut down by a desperate resistance member fleeing police cells used by the CP in a most supreme act of irony! He had been in the wrong place at the right time!

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Submitted by rikersbeard

# Repressed Memories

'Dad, why can't we go home?' My boy Raul said to me. We sat there alone on the swings, the sound of scraping metal defiling the quiet atmosphere.

'White Forest is our home' I replied with slight fear. 'Has been for years'.

I always wondered about the day when I would have to tell my son everything. All that happened in City 17. To me. To his mother. The stress of keeping my past a mystery from him constantly consumes me. I did it all for him, but maybe it's about time he knew.

'I've heard others talk about the city', he said. I thought everyone had put City 17 behind them. I thought they had started a new life here in White Forest. But I guess that's just my own ignorance, as I try to clear my mind any time I hear that name. I gave a worrying sigh. I couldn't keep it to myself anymore; Raul had to know the truth. His Mother wouldn't agree with my intentions, but I fear I may have passed the point of no return; my absence of speech only raised his suspicions. I signalled my son to walk with me. I kept him close, but remained quiet. There was uncertainty in his eyes - he didn't know what I was going to say. Neither did I.

White Forest isn't like it was a decade ago, when we first moved in. Back then, everything had a purpose. From scout outposts to field labs, everything served for the resistance's efforts. Now bunkers sprawl the surface. White Forest has become more than a military base, it's a new home -a new hope- to the human race.

We walked up to our bunker, next to the ruined timber mill. It may be dark and cramped inside, but there's no place I feel safer. I pushed the door open and let my eyes adjust to the low light. Raul predicted my next move and sat on the bed, in which I then took place next to him. We sat there in silence for a long while. I fumbled my fingers, trying to think of what to say and where to start, but my mind just blanked. Something had to be said to break the tension.

'It's hard for me to imagine a time before they came. I guess you know who I mean'. We stared for a moment.

'The combine?' He questioned. That word triggered another burning sensation inside of me.

'Yes. The combine.' Slowly, memories came back to me. The times before the Seven Hour War. The hell that was after. As they returned, I unravelled my story to Raul. He found out all that I could remember.

~

Some of my earliest memories are with Justine. Her beauty was exceeded only by her grace. We studied law in college together, but it took years before we started seeing each other. It was a while before we figured it out, but we finally realised we wanted to spend our lives together. I can faintly remember the day we moved in together. The apartment was bare, with only the furniture we needed to live. We chose it because it was near the train station - the sound of the clicking wheels against the track reminded us both of the progress of humanity. It was the only music we ever needed.

To be honest, memories of the Seven Hour War evade me. It's not because "it all happened in a flash" - it's because I've spent decades trying to forget everything about it. Just like everything else in the latter half of my life. I'm constantly reminded of the war, though.

Earth Surrenders, I see nearly everyday, along with the face of that monster that "saved humanity". For me, there was no "Seven Hour War". The war never ended.

I didn't really know what to do with myself. They made us their slaves, even if you could never really see it. I just wanted to escape my life, but I couldn't leave Justine behind. She needed me, like I needed her. Life went nowhere, unlike the trains. We longed to ride on them. Maybe to find some place exciting, or somewhere to start a new life. All we knew is that we had to get out of there.

My heart stopped as I remembered the day when everything changed. I had returned from collecting the morning rations from the station to find Justine in tears, her head in her hands. The world had taken its toll on her. I took place in the empty seat next to

Justine and threw my arms around her. I sat there for ages, telling her we would get through.

That morning, more people than usual came through the apartments. I wasn't quite sure what was going on, but made no suspicion of it. Justine couldn't calm down, so I took her to the train tracks - the only place we felt safe. However, on our way there, I noticed something provoking; the Citadel looked as if it was exploding. My hopes were quickly crushed, though, as I realised it wasn't falling apart - it was on full alert. Scanners, Gunships and Hunter Choppers polluted the skies into a horrific mess of machinery. Seeing the danger the city was in, I ran with Justine into the underground passageways of the tracks. We hid and tried to assess our next steps. However, we were foolish to stay in one spot. Metropolice came and shoved us against the walls. In a second I was out cold, but Justine would tell me that a man charged through the tunnel and beat them back to Hell. He took their weapon and ran off. I still wish for the chance to meet this man face-to-face and tell him, sincerely, for saving Justine.

~

'Hey Dad', Raul spoke softly, 'I'm sorry'.

'For what?'

'For making you remember'.

I didn't quite know how to respond. His face perfectly blended curiosity and sorrow. It wasn't clear to me if he wanted me to continue or to halt.

'Don't worry about it', I replied gently. 'You need to know'. I decided to continue reciting my reflection.

~

It was a week later when I woke up in the midst of gunfire and rubble. What happened in that week still remains a mystery to me, but I knew something was clear - humanity was finally taking a stand. Likely, its last stand. The resistance forces I had heard little about took to the streets, the tunnels and the rooftops. Fine men and women risked their lives to try and save each other. It was both horrific and glorious. My first instinct was to get up and fight, even if I had to do it bare-fisted. I got up from my bed but quickly fell to the ground. My muscles were exhausted and I could barely stand. I started trying to crawl to the living room when I heard the deafening sound of quiet sobbing. Justine was sitting in the couch, her hands in her head again. Using what remained of me, I hauled myself up onto the couch to console her. Resistance fighters flooded through, offering to help us, or even trying to force us, out of the city. I rejected their support to stay here with Justine.

My mind flashed back to a week earlier. It was all the same - the people passing through, the tears, the sirens, the feeling of hopelessness.

Justine finally found it in herself to leave the city, once and for all, with the help of the resistance. It took us a lot of strength to make our way through the war-torn city. The smoke choked us at every breath we took. Gunfire made our ears ring. The sight of our fallen brothers and sisters bled our eyes dry. We made it to the outskirts of the city when we realised the evacuation plan. Trains. The resistance was using locomotives to take everyone out of the city. My whole life I longed to ride on one with Justine, to escape it all. Now the time has come for our dreams to come true. To escape the city and begin anew.

The war wasn't over, but White Forest sheltered us. With the Suppression Field down, we were finally able to start a family. Our excitement was pre-anticipated, however. During the birth of Raul, the traumas that Justine suffered through her life hit her one final time. Her newborn was the last light she ever saw. I know I promised to tell Raul everything, but he could never know about this. I miss my Justine, but I'm proud of my son.

~

With my story concluded and the daylight fading, I decided to walk Raul up to the peak of White Forest, where we gazed over the ruins of City 17.

'There', I said, 'there is our home'.

---

Submitted by by PlanetAlexander

# Prospero

The Black Sea  
005-2/11-100w

Poverty and desperation had led me to Sunny Beach. With its corny name. Where the drinks were cheap & the sun-loungers unsupervised. It was insane the amount of food left going to waste. It was a pretty idyllic life sleeping all-day, scrounging all-night, living on leftovers; until tourist season came to an end.

When I discovered the cave. It was perfect. Fresh water flowing nearby and flanked by arduous cliff faces in all directions. Soon I had everything I needed. An actual bed frame with a quilt; Battery powered television; Wind-up radio; gas stove; Flash-light; tin opener; Magazines; A gameboy ...

Amazing the things you used to find left lying on the street at 4am.

One season, the tourists never came back. Things started washing up on our beaches.

- a neon alligator with long yellowish tendrils coming out of its face.
- a silky black thing covered in tusks. A white stripe along its underside.
- a translucent azure worm with barbed appendages branching off it like a tree.
- skeletal clawed humanoids with nightmare-ish faces.
- an armless albino biped, a cracked shell for a head. Seven lidless eyes.
- a Jumbo-sized bull-torsoed giant. Its pinkish-white mottled skin the colour and texture of raw meat. Two spiked, elongated mandibles for arms. A hideous grin on its bloated sheep's face.

Silver Smoke  
120 5\11 150wr+004-1/11b-50w

Day three and I'm almost convinced I've waited too long. They're swarming. Never seen so many of them in one place. They've re-taken the pier; guarded it lightly at first, until they realized a retaliation wasn't coming.

The sky's gone from grey to a mix of pink, red and purple hues. Clouds now lined with black mascara. This is as good a time as any.

I'm ready.

I switch the dial and hear the explosion.. I see a distant fire puff and glow. The sound of the pier creaking and starting to recede. My shaking hands refocus the crossbow's scope. I don't want to miss a second of this!

The soldiers tumbling below the sea's skin. Those suits weren't designed to be buoyant. All the docked drop-ships have gone under now.

That was for Ted.

After ten minutes, another pack of drop-ships arrive.

The five mounted guns don't take long to reconfigure. Everything aimed in the appropriate direction. Elastic bands all tied around each trigger. One of them is a black hair-band. The five attached ropes are in place. My trench is dug.



Looking through scoped eyes, I see there are now more of them than ever. But none of them have spotted me. None know the detonation's origin. I'll show them.

This is for Matt.

I pull the cords intermittently. The bell-ringer of death! Then all at once. Showering survivors and newcomers alike with projectiles. We'd set up the exact same trap before, along the Kamchiya river-way, eons back. Not long after the sightings, the Invasion, the Protection Centres and the almost-war. But this works better than I could've dreamed. They concentrate their fire in my direction. I've now fastened the ropes, exhausting gun after gun.

In no time at all, a gush of soldiers swamp my location. I see everything in the blackness. They're marching into the mouth of my cave.

Blue Rock

350 8\11 100wr 400 Sept Kid 110wr

They weren't the first to come cold-calling. when refugees came to my door I almost told them to get lost. 'til I spotted Laura standing amongst them. I'd never seen anyone with that expression; halfway between desperate and nonplussed.

This whole area was perfect for the rebels, tucked away from anywhere important. They re-christened it Prospero Outpost. Not much of an improvement I thought...

We traded. We charted cave depths that went on for miles. Built hidden walkways. I let them work on elaborate contraptions. Walls within walls within walls. But the rebels expected too much. Assumed too much. After Matt and Ted had failed, Laura pleaded with me to join them.

The Pink Death

200 6/11 125wr 300 7 125wr

The soldiers slow. An orange flare is lit, followed by a red and a blue. Most of them carry the usual Pulse Rifles, but I spot at least one with a weapon I've never seen. It's a long and chunky bronze-coloured chain-gun. The barrel is short and circular. Concealed on my wooden walkway, I'm gently working the chains to see if the old mechanism still works. It does.

Parasites pour from the now open cages of their enclosures onto the bemused soldiers. We only kept the poisoned-tipped and super-fast variety. It seems to do the trick!

Case-less explosive rounds splinter the wood around my feet. I'm being chased until my pursuers slip on the gunky black trail I've left for them under the gantries. Into the unexplored part of my home. Where we heard clicks and squeals and the unmistakable glow of an insectoid nest in the abyss below. A group of soldiers, about ten, slide uncontrollably along the tar-slide and out of sight. In the glee of watching them slip into hell, I don't spot the bronze soldier fire a clean round straight into me.

Black Coast

899 10/11 200wr 010 4/11 100w

That morning on the coast-path. The highway. The house still standing. The bed that Laura and I had once hid under all-night. It was still all there. Newly slept in. I found Laura and the others outside. I remember it being such a pretty day. My brain circles around it. Never fully remembering. I still can't process it, Laura. I still can't bring myself

to accept that I'll never see you again. I have to believe we'll see each-other again. This is my way of dealing with it.

The Red Trail  
999 11/11 100wr

Blood is spurting from my leg. The soldiers have caught up with me. End of the line. All I have left is the hose.

The initial pressure once I twist the nozzle knocks out the first wave of them. They clumsily get to their feet and the second wave is far more sure-footed. They've driven me into a corner. I'm trapped. And they don't waste any time. Do they smell the petrol everywhere?

Florescent flash -

The muzzle of a Pulse Rifle -

Sparks catching in the air -

Flakes of fire finding their place in the ether.

This is for Laura.

The floor rolls out a blazing carpet of death. The entire cave is glistening, wet with the heat. Dazzling, sparkling! There are no soldiers now. Just dancing skeletons coming to terms with the encompassing fire.

Is it wishful thinking? I can swear I'm watching their faces now in the inferno surrounding us, filled with shame and realization. I'm seeing their fragile black outlines collapse into nothing and I continue spraying the petrol.

---

Submitted by Malcolm Warren Cheaple

# The Oasis Incident

The conga line of rusty junk had been lumbering along the old railways for quite some time, until it suddenly cut the throttle and hit the brakes in the middle of nowhere. Markov woke up to the ear piercing noise that ensued, worse than the screeching of a houndeye. He hadn't showered in a week, his neck was cramped and the air conditioning was out. The doors of the old railcar sprang open and let in a scent of pine forest with an undertone of creosote and brake dust, replacing the smell of hot rubber flooring and moldy seats. The idling diesel engine drowned out all sounds. He scratched his greasy black hair, took in a few deep breaths and looked at his wife. "Eva, any clue what this is?" He asked. "A breakdown or something blocking the tracks, maybe?" She offered, having no clue either.

An old bald man in the back laughed like he knew something they didn't. "It's the Overwatch." He grumbled. "Mark, there's two of those... giant grabby flying things... sitting outside." Eva pointed out. Hearing those words, Markov turned his head to the window so hard his neck cramp subsided. The carriage behind them creaked, shook a bunch of times and the sounds of heavy footsteps, military jargon and consecutive clicks of machine gun fire selectors drew closer. A dozen graphite gray soldiers dressed to defuse an IED and survive a chemical strike all at the same time poured through the gangway in a stack and broke off like a zipper, each one grabbing a passenger and slamming them to the ground without a word.

The last soldier approached Markov and his wife, with a shotgun loosely hanging on a three-point sling. He stared at him for five seconds through blood red gas mask lenses and extended a corded black device from his belt. "Are you a human named Markov Chornovil?" He asked. Markov grinned. "No, I'm a meat popsicle." The device dropped and hung by it's cord, with the shotgun now in it's place. It's serrated breaching muzzle hit Markov in the stomach, followed by the stock striking him in the head hard enough to make him black out. He regained consciousness on the floor with his hands zip tied behind his back. "Are you a human named Markov Chornovil?" The soldier asked again with the same intonation as before. "Yes. Don't hurt my wife." He conceded.

The soldier slotted the corded device back into his belt. "What'd he do? He's never broken any of your laws! Why aren't you interrogating anyone else?" Eva demanded. "Trust me, we'll put him on the next train at Chemutov 2." The soldier answered while signalling his comrades to take Markov outside. "Where's that? We're reloca-" She was cut off before she could finish. "Next train." He shushed, holding an index finger to his air filters.

Markov was escorted to the armored cars and dropships parked trackside. He had his ziptie snapped off and was ushered inside the cramped APC with the hothead and his squad. The vehicle shook violently as the dropship grabbed it and thrust off into the sky. Half an hour of silence passed by. Markov kept glancing at the small digital counter on the navigational display. A little over two kilometers and rising, the coordinates rapidly approaching zero. Out of the blue, the red-eyed soldier removed his mask, detached a metal cylinder from a large, grey plastic hole his throat and replaced it with an identical metal cylinder. His squadmates immediately followed suite. Markov stared at each of them in confusion and terror, but kept a poker face throughout the process.

Their eyes, perpetually in thousand yard stares and devoid of pigmentation, were now looking back at him. "So... My wife. Is she safe, and do I get to see her?" He broke the silence. "You have a wife?" The leader asked with an utterly straight face. Markov looked

puzzled. "Selective amnesia, m-" he started, before a flash of white engulfed his vision, followed by a quickly fading blast noise coming from outside. Markov checked the navigator as the vehicle started descending like a freefalling elevator. It only displayed endless number nines. The fall ended as all four wheels touched down with a thump. Clanging noises echoed through the APC as the dropship released its magnetic fingertips. For a few moments, everything was silent. The soldiers were putting their masks back on. "Hold the fuck up, where'd we land?" Markov shouted, increasingly suspicious of the way he suddenly felt four times lighter. As he awaited an answer, the doors flung open.

A large hand entered the passenger compartment, grabbing the soldiers one by one and throwing them out like a hobo rummaging through a trash can. It reached Markov's leg, dragged him out like a dead animal and dropped him on his back. An old man in a 70's space suit approached. He had a perfect head of gray hair. Standing beside him were a pair of tall, faceless humanoids that immediately caused Markov to cringe as he laid eyes upon their unusually proportioned skeletal bodies, asymmetrical musculature and external organs hanging around their spines where their rib cages should've been. Synths, he thought. He didn't want to know more. "Captain Chornovil, last survivor of the X-13 expeditionary team. Am I right? Get up, please." He bluntly requested. Markov got on his feet and spun around, looking for some clues as to where he was. A huge bluish metal hangar with equally huge prongs hanging from the roof.

He faced the old man. "And you are...?" He asked. "Dr. Sam Bradford. You might remember my name from your mission briefing." The doctor signalled him to follow, and walked towards a door that slid open for him. Markov glanced at the Overwatch soldiers who brought him there, now lying motionless on the floor. He chose to follow Bradford. Outside of the hangar was an expansive landscape covered in immaculate green grass, reminiscent of his old laptop wallpaper. Markov shifted his focus to the sky, which instead of being a sky, appeared to be complete visual chaos of abstract images, shifting and stretching, splitting into pieces and changing colors as he looked at it. It gave him a headache. "Stop looking at the void. I want to ask you some questions." The old scientist stated impatiently. "I was about to say the same thing. Why'd you drag me in... What is this anyways? Let me guess, you're some scientific asswipe working for those Satanists from outer space. Friend of Breen's, eh?" Markov started. "Allow me to stop you right there. The resource extraction sector of our operation is not for anyone's personal gain.

It's a small part of something much larger, strictly for the benefit of all sentient life. You see, we've been making immense progress in figuring out what exactly lies beyond the known universe, and how we as a collective of sentient lifeforms can reach... reach... Mr. Chornovil, the man himself." Bradford explained, but Markov didn't quite catch the last bit. "Excuse me?" He interjected, before realizing the doctor looked like two people at the same time, as though he wanted to see him as a gray-haired old man, but someone else's face kept trying to phase in. A pale-faced man with black hair shaped in a crew cut. "This... sequence has not gone quite as we had planned, Mr. Chornovil. I am not one to... trifle such an excellent opportunity, however." The two-faced man followed up, now with two distinct voices speaking in sync. "You do remember what happened to your friends on your... How should I put it... Co-operative dimensional venture... with the Black Mesa science team?" He went on, reminding Markov of the top-secret joint expedition that went ass-backwards and cost him his military career.

The retired soldier had seen that same man in a business suit, haunting his flashback nightmares. He delivered a punch to the hallucination's throat, lurched past and behind the synth standing to the left, grabbed its liver and pulled it hard enough to crack the ligaments and tubes attaching it to the torso. The synth screeched and dislocated Markov's jaw with a single elbow strike, but he got a hold of the pistol grip on its long gun and fired a deafening two-shot burst that penetrated the other synth's chest, causing it to spastically stumble backwards and fall. He climbed up the back of the one

still standing, kicked the liver twice and caused the tubes to burst open and spew out a clear liquid. The lanky abomination lowered itself on one knee and erected a pair of thick hair-like antennae out of it's right shoulder, in a seemingly desperate bid to call for reinforcements. Markov leaped off and stood over Bradford's body. The face looked normal again. He shrugged and used his foot to turn it into a strawberry pie. "Tired of these goddamn glow-in-the-dark interdimensional psychic vampires. What do you think? Oh, right. You don't. Give me that." He muttered, as he removed the gun out of the synth's loose grip. Lacking any other options, the captain walked away into the endless green.

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Submitted by Mr. Man

# Fragments

The pale morning light struck the station roof, barely piercing the grime and muck that caked the glass panels. The sunlight, already choked by an overcast sky, sent beams of orange light in through the few clear panes, only to fall into a deep and murky sea of filthy brown floor tiles.

Harrison squinted up at the ceiling, the vague silhouettes of gulls passing over the once grand building. Getting his bearings, he looked down and took a seat at the grimy table, idly knocking a discarded takeaway box to the floor. How had he come to be here? His last thoughts had been the fading dreams of his long lost family, as he had woken on the putrid sofa in his apartment. That and the thirst. The constant thirst.

A stranger approached, new blood, the smell of diesel from the station platform fresh on his boots. Harrison looked him in the eye, his voice hurried and low. "Don't drink the water. They put something in it, to make you forget." His gaze fell back to the table, "I don't even remember how I got here."

By the time he lifted his head the stranger had moved on. "Crazy old man," thought Harrison, mocking his warped reflection in the table's tarnished surface. Then it struck him again, a dryness in the back of his throat. He quickly got to his feet, staggering through the station, his heart pounding in his ears. He checked a number of discarded paper cups left on the tables, upending them into his mouth, hoping in vain that they would contain anything to quench his thirst. Then he saw it, at the end of one of the platforms. Doctor Breen's Private Reserve. The vending machine hummed pleasantly, a number of cans already lying in the trough. He reached out and took one. It felt cold as ice in his hand, the condensation glistening in the low light. He hastily cracked it open with a satisfying hiss and took a long deep drink. With every gulp he felt his senses clouding, his conscious thoughts ebbing away into an inky black void.

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"Run!" a woman's voice called out over the sound of a panicked crowd. Harrison's eyes snapped open and were stung by the bright light of the afternoon sun. He was running down one of the streets of City 17, his jacket now missing and his forehead drenched with sweat. He glanced around, counting ten other citizens, maybe more. Somebody up ahead stumbled and cried out, but the stampede did not let up. Harrison stepped on what he suspected was a limb, hearing a choked scream for help somewhere below him which quickly faded. A male voice called out, "Don't stop! We need to reach the overpass"

Then there was another sound. A distant whirring which seemed to gain on the runners in a matter of seconds. There was a blast of warm air as a combine gunship swept overhead. The overpass was visible up ahead now, about 200 metres in front. The gunship reached it before it gracefully flipped up and over like a breaching whale and was now facing the group head on. It accelerated towards them, its front mounted gun lighting up. The vocal leaders of the crowd, the man and women in patchy resistance attire were cut down immediately, followed by another two citizens before everyone scattered. Harrison spotted a narrow alleyway and bolted towards it, colliding with a younger man who had been running alongside him. The two were sent twirling onto the ground and Harrison quickly scrambled to his feet.

"Argh, my ankle!" the young man yelled and reached out towards him. Harrison

hesitated for a second, glancing to the alleyway entrance then back to the man on the ground. He took a deep breath and continued running, the pleas quickly gave way to angry, hateful shouting. Then something he didn't expect. "Go to Hell, Dad!"

The words struck him in the back and shot through his body, turning his blood to ice. He stopped and forced himself to take one more look over his shoulder and his eyes were met by a familiar pale face twisted in a combination of agony and betrayal. That moment of clarity hung in the air for what felt like minutes, until it was cut off by another sudden barrage of gunfire. His son was gone, vanishing into a murky orange cloud of shattering concrete, dust and blood.

Harrison felt all the strength that remained in his body tear away, sending him staggering into a rotten wooden door which collapsed under his weight. His head landed heavily on the grimy floor inside and the impact rattled his brain. He vomited, barely able to keep his head off the floor as he did. He eased his eyes open and noticed the room was dark, save for a dull blue light in one corner. As his vision cleared he could just make out outline of a vending machine. He crawled over, wincing at the sharp pain in his skull which swelled with every movement. As he made it to the machine, he punched the lowest button a number of times before it could dispense no more. There was a series of heavy thuds, each of which ejected a cloud of dust from the trough and Harrison reached inside, pulling the cans out one by one. They were slightly warm, the refrigeration unit in the vendor likely long burned out, but he didn't care. He shimmied up to the side of the machine and slumped against it, cracking open the first can.

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The next time his thoughts returned to him, he did not immediately recognise his surroundings. He appeared to be stranded in a sea of rubble which stretched out in every direction. An arc of green energy shot out across the sky and he turned to the source. He almost lost his footing at the sight of it. The Citadel. Its upper portion looked to have been completely destroyed, a huge vortex of cloud swirled above it. How long had he been out? What had he missed? He tried to collect his thoughts as he noticed the ground had begun to rumble, the chunks of rock and steel shifting around him. He looked back to the remains of the tower as a bright light started to rise into the vortex from its base. A series of large crafts were ejected from the walls and drifted overhead. A sharp pain ripped through his brain, as if something was trying to tear its way into his mind. Bright flashes filled his vision, traces of images burned onto his retinas. Combine soldiers devastated by a powerful weapon. Nova Prospekt lying in ruins, overcome by antlions. Then he saw... him. The stranger from the train station. The combine were on the move, a number of severe setbacks throughout City 17 had left their forces crippled and he was at the source. With one final surge of energy the citadel collapsed in on itself, the enormous metal structure buckling at its core, before exploding outwards. Harrison could do nothing but watch as a wall of brilliant white heat and energy ripped through the rubble towards him, throwing it in all directions. He closed his eyes tightly and in a fraction of a second felt his entire body succumb to it, the level of pain utterly inconceivable and in the next it was simply gone. The pain, the sorrow, the suffering and above all, the thirst.

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Submitted by Andy Morris aka UrbaNebula

# Time, Dr. Breen?

The distant rumble of battle could be felt even in his abode atop the Citadel. Below, the rabble in the streets had been rapidly gaining ground, smashing through the last bastions of Overwatch defences. The vultures lay in wait at the foot of the tower. He knew that time was running out.

For the past week, he had been desperately trying to convince his masters that the situation was under control. Reinforcements had been called in from Cities across Europe, but it soon became clear that they too faced a similar predicament. He cursed himself for his arrogance; he had placed too much pride in his personal army and let his short-sightedness get the better of him. The thought of a disaster of this magnitude had never entered his mind. It was inconceivable to him that there could be any real threat to his rule, and the prospect that he was now vulnerable injected him with a fear he had not felt for nearly two decades. But it wasn't those below and their righteous anger that he feared; it was proving to no longer be useful to those above.

What once enticed Wallace Breen now terrified him. He was their hostage. His worst instincts were seduced by the prospect of unassailable power, something far beyond his meagre backdoors in Washington and greased palms in the Senate. His insatiable hunger was his, and the world's, undoing. Instead of being granted the honour of the first man, the only man, to bring the Earth to the stars, he was instead met with entrapment; entrapment between a race who despised him and a race who tormented him.

He had but only glimpsed the cosmic power that was the Universal Union. It was shown to him by that grey, sinister figure in the weeks before the Incident, revealing a universe dominated by ancient, sentient superstructures, enveloping entire stars like a raptor's talons, shimmering with a dazzling blue that shone to the deepest corners of time and space. He saw countless alien worlds filled with impossible geometry and even more impossible creatures; he saw trillions upon trillions of enormous towers protruding from planets made of metal and immense voids of nothingness left in the wake of celestial consumption. It was absolute power. It was indistinguishable from power wielded by Gods themselves. It could be his, if he played his part.

Men like him find it impossible to resist such a thing. He did as he was asked, sending the researchers to procure the sample. In the ensuing chaos he hid with his loved ones (and a host of powerful benefactors) in a vast underground shelter, weathering out the catastrophe from the behind the safety of lead-lined blast doors whilst their colleagues fought and died on the surface. When the invaders eventually arrived, he saw the behind the veil, and realised he had been duped; it was not the peaceful union he was promised, but a planet-wide extermination. An incomprehensible, frantic mass of silhouetted shapes poured through gateways in the sky, laying waste to everything they found, scorching the earth and blotting the horizon with darkness. It dawned on him that very soon the world will be reduced to ashes. While the rest of humanity hurled themselves at the attackers in a desperate attempt to stall the invasion, the Administrator tried in vain to undo the wrong he had unleashed. He powered up the facility's dormant transmitter and offered Earth's surrender. Only minutes had passed when the monitors flashed a response.

A contingent of guards, a traitor and an old enemy were all he had for company in the last hours of his life. A reunion of Black Mesa scientists, twenty years later. It was no secret the hatred that Dr. Vance held for him. Eli looked on him with the same contempt in his eyes from all those years ago, when the dear Administrator was murdering his own scientists by the dozens, throwing test subject after test subject into the portal to that unfathomable place. Even so, he had always felt a kindling of fondness for Dr. Vance; he



was one of the only other scientists in his field that truly dedicated himself to his work, much like himself. Sometimes he wonders whether he had let Vance continue so long in his ill-begotten terrorist campaign simply because he didn't consider him a threat, or because of something else.

"...salvation comes at a cost, my dear friend. But this, all of this, is temporary. Soon, we will transcend to the heavens and become one with the stars, as is our destiny. It is the sacrifice we must make to ensure our survival! Tell me, Eli, what's your alternative? Extinction? Would you have us crawl back into the sea and drown with the other wastrels who inhabit it's depths? Would you rather see us fighting amongst ourselves like we always have, or do you believe in the chance to become something greater? Something that--"

"Greater?! You call this 'greater'? Your web of lies is coming undone, Breen. The people have seen you for what you are. A snake. A coward. A sellout who would doom humanity for a shot at power. You claim to have saved us, but you're no savior -- all you did, and all you've ever done, is watch as our world slowly dies, safe in your tower. Your time has come and you will answer for what you've done."

"...Well, I wouldn't expect you to understand. You've always been a stubborn fool. Perhaps some more time in your holding cell will make you more... amenable."

Breen's smug grin hid a deeper anguish. Eli's words had got to him. Sealing his old friend back into his pod, he ordered his guards out of the room, and he was alone once more, with only the distant thumping of shellfire to permeate the silence. He wondered if he had served his purpose. Was he, like so many others, simply a pawn in this cosmic game?

He sat, and stared at the clock on his desk. The ticking of time is inexorable and unapologetic. Everyone's time runs out.

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Submitted by Callum Drinkwater