



PLANETPHILLIP.COM

Finishing Half-Life is just the beginning!

Writing Competition
January 2011

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
The Winner.....	4
The Story of Two Hopes.....	5
Abandoned.....	9
Retaliation.....	13
Riding Combine.....	16
Curtain Call.....	21
All along the watchtower.....	23
Guide.....	24
Night Patrol.....	30
The Light.....	33
A Conflict of Species.....	36

Introduction

This PDF document contains all the entries I received for a fan-fiction writing competition I ran for my website PlanetPhillip.Com.

Thank you to all who entered.

The rules were that it had to be set in the Half-Life universe and be canon. It could start any time after the beginning of Half-Life 1 and end any time before the end of Half-Life 2: Episode Two. I set those rules because I didn't want speculative fiction for Episode Three, at least not for this competition.

All the entries have been added as they were received, I.e. I have not edited them in any way. Not all the authors are native English speakers, so please expect a variety of grammatical competence.

The order of the stories listed has no consequence, just as I copied them into this document as I opened the emails.

Under each story are my comments.

It should be noted that I am not an experienced fiction writer and the only thing that qualifies me to judge them is that I ran the competition and I am providing the prize. Your view probably differs but I doubt the authors entered purely in the hope of winning.

Personally, I hope the competition provide the catalyst for some creative effort and the results interest a broad range of readers.

I am happy with the number of entries and will run another competition at some point in 2011.

I hope you, the reader, will enjoy reading the stories.

You can comment on them at the website: [Writing Competition January 2011](#)

Phillip Marlowe

29th January 2011

UPDATE

I had forgotten to include Mel's submission and I would like to apologize for my mistake. His story has now been included at the end. Sorry Mel.

Phillip Marlowe - 31st January 2011

The Winner

Well choosing the winner turned out to be easier than expected. Not because the other entries were bad but simply because one stood out as THE one. It was the only one that had to be covering the last few lines to stop myself jumping ahead.

So, without further delay, drum roll please.....

The winner of the *PlanetPhillip.Com January 2011 Writing Competition* is

Abandoned by Zekiran

Congratulations to Zekiran.

Now, I would like to mention two other entries.

Firstly, *Curtain Call* by Patrick Wilson. I really liked how Patrick managed to explore a character within such a short text but also put it in a HL context. The mixing of memories from a previous life was well done.

The second story is *Guide* by Jack Skelhon. It's a good story and well written but I felt it was over written. I had the feeling it was more about him showing how he can write rather than telling a story. I apologize in advance if that sounds too critical of me, but that's how it read.

Anyway. Thanks again to all the authors.

The Story of Two Hopes

By =ExG= Nomad

Author's Notes

Sorry for the bad grammar but I cant talk your language , I still hope you like my story, have a nice reading.

Chapter 1: Awakening

Its year 1995 , My name is John Shepard , i was a worker at the Black Mesa research facility near sector C testlabs. I remember this story clear as day , and im gonna tell you all about it. It started as a nice peacefull day , like every else. Those candy machines were not working , and the scientist did like they ate the itelligence soup. I was on my way to the Testing Chamber of sector C, i was running like hell and in my hand i had the documents that were 100% proving that this test should be canceled. However they did not believed me, that ignorant scientist was only like „No.. its well within a acceptable range“.

As the chamber started to go all greenish i realized that we are all doomed , i ran for the exit , i took the elevator up and hoped i wont fall down with it, when i finally made my way to the exit and stepd into the high security train i seen a scientist runing behind me yelling „Wait for me please!!!!“ , i was not able to stop the train anymore , i just left him behind like a douche.

My goal was to reach the surface and get out of the Black Mesa Sector, when i smelled fresh air i tought that my goal is just ahead the tunnel, when suddenly the ceiling collapsed and destroyed the rail system , i fell with the entier train down on the ground and was unconscious...

Chapter 2: Foreseen Consequences

I woke up all bloody in a crashed tram, my vision was blurred and my mind was like a flickering light at the end of the tunnel. I had to make my way out; I had to escape this hellhole. I was running to find a safe place for me to hide in and wait until the chaos is over; I was running down a corridor when I crashed into some other survivor, a female survivor.

She looked pretty nice, I actually remember her from the training course, and she was a nice hologram. She showed me the way to the armory, I got a Spas12 and a Desert Eagle, I also broke a pipe and wanted to use as a melee weapon, but it was so hot I couldn't even hold it. We were both making some progress on getting out of the facility. We both made it all the way to the train station, we fought zombies, head crabs and even the army wanted us dead. I can't tell where we went; I only remember that I nearly got my hand cutoff by some sort of tentacle.

We step on the train and made it full speed ahead out of the facility. I was like “YEES!! We made it” , but my celebration was too early. We got attacked by army choppers and our train was a busted wreck. I took out the RPG and armed it. When I fired the first rocket it only threw out a tail of the glass and missed. When I shot the second rocket it missed too.

With no rockets left I was a sitting duck near a nuclear bomb. I was saying bye bye to my life, the pilot looked me in the eyes and set his finger on the "FIRE" button.

I remember seeing his finger going down the button and I seen the rockets engine lighting up like a christmas tree. However the rocket was crashed away by some sort of alien aircraft and we were back safe again. We used a old jeep from the nearby depot to get us out. When we got out of the Black Mesa sector we only seen a big explosion. And we knew from that point on , that all our friends who didn't make it out were doomed and burned alive.

Chapter 3: The Second Way

Some things have happened since the last time we were in Black Mesa , some sort of aliens has invaded earth and then they were declared to our allies. But do your allies beat you up to the ground like hell? NO! , it was the goddamned fault of Dr. Breen , he sold us like rabbits to a circus. We became the combines toys. I was sitting in my apartment , minding my own business when the Civil Protection units crashed in and killed my wife, I was running away with tears in my eyes, I didn't even want to live anymore but the revenge feeling gave me the strength to survive.

I have met a person who helped me to escape and gave me a chance to get to the rebellion, I had nothing to lose anymore so I accepted the offer and ran with him to Dr. Kleiner's secret hideout. Dr. Kleiner was a nice person , he gave me some water supplies , some food and also a bulletproof vest with a map. He told me that if I get to Black Mesa east they help me further. I made my way to his lab , when I was going through the door behind his teleport thingy I heard a voice of a nice lady greeting Kleiner. I had no time for lovely things in my mind , I had to make my way to Black Mesa East. I was riding with a strange old boat through the sewers of the city, the smell of dead bodies was all over my way. The choppers were all over the place and when I was arriving at a combine outpost I remember seeing the citadel getting some sort of expanded.

I was looking for some weapons cause this situation is about to get ugly, I was going into the old combine base hoping to be not discovered. I took some weapons when suddenly I heard the door opening and some soldiers talking about a area check and Freeman , when I heard the word Freeman I knew that there's still a hope for humanity. I just peeked through the door and saw a combine coming straight here. I took my luck to a test and rushed out like Rambo shooting everything in my way , however I could not miss getting hit by some bullets. I remember the bloody massacre that was going on , I broke a combine's neck , I was shot in the arm , I cracked my leg. However I was still able to get to my goal at Black Mesa East. When I arrived there they gave me some strange ugly greeny medicine but it worked, I also got a better outfit and I was now the system manager. I thought I was safe down here, well not that much.

Chapter 4: Unwanted Guest

I was sleeping in my bed , I had a nightmare about the death of my wife , when I was suddenly woke up by a big explosion sound. The lights went off , I seen the hallway filled with flares and the massacre going on. I wanted to get some weapons but the way was blocked by rubble. I made it to get past the soldiers unnoticed , and I was shocked , tired and nearly death in a old train station. I couldn't avoid seeing the flashbacks from the times with my wife at Black Mesa. I took a train out of that place and went to the only safe place I

knew , called White Forest.

I was bombed away, it was like they were only going after me. With some luck I got out of the Black Mesa East area but I could not continue my way on a train. I had to walk trough the coast line , I remember getting some sort of poo from the vortiguants at one camp , it was a really cool thing to get me safely trough the rest of the coast. After 2 days of walking I was in the White Forest area. Dr.Magnusson was working on a super awesome rocket so I was helping him with the coordinate systems and other categorys here. One day I was sitting on the balcony looking at the citadel , It suddenly blew up like a selfdestruction, the blast wave was so hard that our systems went down for the entire hour and I was thrown with my chair against the wall.

We were researching the entire situation when a another explosion came out , that made the citadel getting into a thing of energy shooting up the sky.

Chapter 5: The Final Countdown

Many days have passed and the rocket was finally done , my nightmares were nearly gone and we had a weapon to end the combine history. However there was the one big problem , with the arrival of Gordon Freeman followed by the massive combine army we had to take our fight with a ton of striders. While the fight was going on the east side of the complex I was using my Ar3 skills on the west side of the facility. Dr.M wanted me to get into the 1st silo and fix the steam system. I fought my way to that place.

When I was going down the ladder I remember a strange needle bursting trough my chest. It was the combine commander who got me like a fish on a string. I fell down bleeding and yelling in pain. He told me that I was like everyone else , just a stupid worm in mud. With every pull he made on the rope more blood came out of me. I was near death lying on the floor , the pipe bursted stream into the room and the silo doors were opening.

I realized that I have to close the steam or everyone will die. The commander was laughing at me , ignoring me crawling towards the valve. When I made it to turn down the valve he made the last pull on the string and my hearth was hooked up. With the last turn of the valve the rocket started to lift off. The entire chamber was getting flooded with fire and I was beign slowly baken alive. I remember the last thing seeing was my wife , black mesa and all that what we did to survive. I closed my eyes and seen the bright light at the end of the tunnel. We both were baken alive, skinned like rat. I was already dead and I seen myself lying on the ground , I was like a ghost, the world slowly faded away and me too.

Well , I don't know what happened then but someway I met a guy called Gman , he told me that on this planet I still have a job to doo. He saved my life and said that my time will come , when the Borealis needs me.

To be continued...

WOW! Did this character have a tough time or what? The spelling and grammar made me smile at times but as the author says he “can't talk our language”.

I think too much happens in this story and maybe the author didn't fully understand the rules.

The first person perspective reads like a narration, which personally I don't mind too much, but as I have learnt, the repetition of “I” can be a little annoying.

There were some nice phrases though. I especially liked the “he sold us like rabbits to a circus”.

Adding Alyx arriving at Dr. Kleiner's lab just as the character left as cool.

All in all, it wasn't hard to read but not worthy of winning.

Abandoned

By Zekiran

“Hey,” it was Lorne’s voice, waking me. “Hey, we got things to do. HQ says they spotted something, want you to go out driving.”

Well that was just peachy. Guess my vacation was over – and by vacation I mean 10 hours of sleep. I dragged myself out of the old cot that I claimed as my own, dragged a calloused hand over my face, and noticed I really needed to shave. That could wait. By the time I got down to the command center, I was feeling as good as I ever did when I knew I was going to be sent out. Not great.

“Calvin, glad you could join us,” Cherise said, perky as usual. “We believe we’ve found a habitable structure, one of the old maps you found last time.”

That was encouraging, “finally, something I did right?” They chuckled, I got a look at the map Cherise had redrawn. Sure enough, I’d been past that ridge and valley once before on a scouting run. It would take less than a day driving, and if there really was something to spruce up over that way, my stay wouldn’t be too bad overnight. If not, well, it wouldn’t be any different than any other mission.

“Don’t forget to pick up one of the standard zeegees,” Lorne said over his shoulder as I headed to the vehicle bay. They were prepping my buggy, I picked up the gravity gun and thanked whoever had decided to start manufacturing the things – they made heavy lifting so much easier. There were only maybe a dozen of them around, and we had two at this outpost. Nestled up in the hills somewhere between City 17 and City 15, a reasonably safe zone to put down roots.

I brought my sleeping gear and some medkids, ammo and the like just to be sure. But from the looks of the map, it might have been a little inn or camping grounds of some kind. I set out just as the sun broke over the snow-capped peaks to the east. I was headed south, the road was pretty good most of the way there.

The smell of pines and fresh air was too good to pass up, I admit I got a little reckless on my way there. But damned if I didn’t feel like exploring by the time I got to where HQ pinned the locale. Of course, I had to leave the buggy up on the north ridge. I could see half a dozen toppled trees and several large boulders had fallen from a headcrab canister impact further up the hillside. Great, that meant headcrabs and possibly zombies.

I decided to leave my sleep sack up in the buggy, I would explore and come on back to it later. If I didn’t make it, well, someone else might use it if they happened upon it. We repurposed so many Combine vehicles and weapons, armor and even structures these days. Might as well re-use our own stuff too.

The hillside was rich with trees and shrubs, I could even hear the sound of rushing water nearby. Birds and insects were the only other noises until...

Until I heard that one particular sound that made any Rebel's blood run cold. The thud-thud-thud of a triple legged monstrosity. A Strider, out here? I hunkered down when I spotted a roadway, it looked worn and well-traveled, but something seemed a bit weird too. From up on the hill I peered over and spotted the top of the Strider as it came around the bend. It didn't look right. In fact it didn't sound right either, now that I could see it too. It looked like it was limping, swaggering, favoring one of its legs. Probably a blast or falling rock damage. Good. That meant I might even be able to out run it if I had to.

It kept going, occasionally making those weird trumpeting sounds. They sounded a little off too, a bit garbled even for a Strider's nonsensical bellowing.

So I went down the way it came, carefully avoiding the actual roadway. It headed north and then turned east, so I was heading south and west. The road was very even, and suddenly I realized why it seemed well-traveled.

The Strider – the same one, it was clear – came walking around the path again less than half an hour later. The damned thing had either saw me, very unlikely, or... it was going in circles! Stupid brain-dead Combine didn't even have the sense to turn around!

I kept going south and the road turned west... And I realized there was a long day ahead of me. No Combine buildings, nothing as sinister as a bunch of zombies. Just that ever-so-popular 'lake of toxic crap'. Great. Well I could head back up along the road and hope that the Strider didn't pace me, or ... Cut through the center of what seemed to be a roughly square outpost area.

The center of the place was slightly higher ground than that toxic pond, thankfully. The day had blossomed into a warm one by noon, as I was cresting what looked to be an old mine site. And sure enough – if the Strider wasn't a clue, there had been a Combine presence here probably to strip whatever was left out of it. But they'd left in a hurry, and probably left a few years ago by the looks of things.

I started getting a prickly feeling, and since I was old enough and experienced enough to know what that meant, I ducked, rolled and brought out my pistol. The skittering headcrab flew back with the three shots I blew into it, and it didn't even twitch by the time it hit the ground.

“Man that wasn't even enough to get my heart pumping,” I muttered, looking around for any further signs of the critters. They always got shipped in threes or more, though I wasn't really sure whether their canister had been lobbed at this place before or after the Combine had been around. Plus, I didn't think they bred down here... The Vorts knew, but I didn't ask them – I was never curious enough to listen to their bizarre prattling spiritualism.

I picked my way carefully around the mine shaft, and the two buildings that the Combine had taken over. They were mostly ruined, but there were supplies scattered around, light fixtures and generator, batteries, even some spare tools and medkits. But this wasn't a good place to settle, and it also wasn't the thing HQ had located on the map. I wondered blandly why they hadn't seen any mine notation, usually those things were on old maps, weren't they?

I had to kill one more headcrab on my way north, it nearly got the jump on me but those damn things make that shikka-shikka noise before they pounce. I hoped that the Strider didn't still have good hearing... I wasn't even sure they *could* hear, really. What senses did such an exotic mess of biology and Combine tech really use?

As I came out of the woods, the Strider was just passing around the next corner. Good, that meant it would be half an hour before it came back this way. I glanced around – this was just east of where I'd parked the buggy but it was up on the ridge north of me. The whole path up there must have been obliterated by that landslide, but past that point it was clear again. Going round in circles, I was. Just like that poor old addled Strider.

And, just past that landslide I saw what I had been after in the first place. There was a set of two-story buildings that I spotted the rooftops of past the hill I was under, and a couple other more or less ruined single-story ones up along the hill both above and below the bigger road. It looked like the Combine had thrown some grenades up there, too, but also they left a number of local landmarks standing. There were a few telephone poles still standing, one set of them looked to lead down to the mine.

I steeled myself, and then bolted. My gear clanked a little, I had the gravity gun strapped to my back and it hurt with those damn sharp pointy bits at the end. But it was worth the bruises I'd have later: this place would be a great location to occupy. The first couple buildings down near the Strider's roadway were all but rubble, I didn't find anything worth using there at all. But then as I walked up the hill and a little east I saw that the main road did a switchback and formed this loop off one side – and that had been collapsed as well by whatever bombs they'd set off. The road could probably be salvaged, if that main section a little to the west could be cleared too.

I spotted the main buildings with ease, they had probably been a very nice resort once. What might have been a fancy park and topiary was now studded with plenty of Combine lawn darts and headcrab capsules. Thankfully, I didn't spot anything in the way of zombies – probably the Combine had cleared everyone and everything out long before the bombs were sent. How nice of them to redecorate like this.

Since I was going to need to clear these stupid headhumpers away first, I got out the gravity gun and looked for some brickwork. The buildings below easily came loose and I started skeet shooting the buggers with whatever I could find. Now that was fun! I counted six canisters, did a little math, and couldn't account for about half a dozen more headcrabs – but maybe they'd died or wandered off anyway.

As I was exploring the resort's main hall, I heard another distinctly Combine sound: the ting-ting-ting of a hopper mine. Terrific. So they'd been up here just to mess with whoever got there next. Well, I had a zeegee and wasn't afraid to use it.

Years of recon and urban scouting left me with plenty of reflexes: I took one quick look into the darkened room where the hoppers were... Counted four, and saw (and smelled) the distinct containers of explosives that had been left to join them. This would be... problematic.

I distantly heard the Strider pass three more times, before I managed to clear that room of immediate threats. Calvin, I thought to myself, you are one lucky bastard.

I counted myself even luckier, when I happened upon a makeshift Combine comm room. I knew how to tweak the machinery to send only to Rebel frequencies... But... There was no power. Terrific.

It dawned on me that I would have to get my ass back down to that mine structure. There were three, maybe four large batteries still there. They'd fit in the Combine power chambers, and I could signal HQ again. I lugged myself back to the rubble laden lawn.

Those half dozen headcrabs I didn't find?

Found 'em on the way down. And back up. I punted the batteries, I remembered long ago that you weren't supposed to tip these things, but maybe these were different from old school car batteries. Punt, walk. Punt, walk. Shoot the headcrab. Duck and breathe shallow as that Strider made yet another pass around its long-worn track.

I was getting tired by the time I had all the batteries up in the building, and got it tuned in to HQ. But it was glorious to see Cherise's pretty round face again. I informed her of the situation, and she conferred with the other brains of the outfit for a few minutes, as I started setting up the place for a night's sleep. I deserved it. Hell I thought I could probably sleep through the Strider's bugling, at this rate. It was getting dark, the thing never stopped or slowed down. I wondered whether it was going to slowly be eaten away by that toxic crap over on the other side of the road...

"If that Strider can't be taken out," Cherise said, breaking my tired daydream, "there's no point in bringing anyone else up there. Do you think you're up to taking on an injured, stupid-headed Strider?" I'd explained what it looked like from up there, in addition to the damage to its one leg, its ... carapace thing had a big long dent in it. No one would be coming for this windup toy, no one would miss it if it went down.

I looked around at the gathered hopper mines, explosive gas tanks, grenades and then my gravity gun... and just grinned like a fool at Cherise.

They let me have first dibs on the room I wanted. The first thing I did was put that burnt, heavily battered (and oddly gooey) Strider carapace up on the wall. It was one hell of a trophy. And at least this time, that jerk Cabbage couldn't possibly take any credit for it!

This was fantastic! Incredibly well-written, lots of descriptive passages and plenty of HL details. The story is distinct and paced to perfection. I had to cover the last few paragraphs with paper to stop myself jumping ahead. This seems to have been written by an experienced writer and if not, then the author should definitely write more.

Lastly, but it didn't affect the judging as it wasn't part of the rules, this story would make a great mod.

Retaliation

by Adrian Lopez

I used to cry myself to sleep, knowing that the world was now a cruel and dark place. I no longer have tears to shed. I lie awake, thinking about when my day will come. They dragged John out from cell the other day, he tried to fight back. He punched and kicked, and I saw him elbow one of them. It was futile. I heard him screaming. He screamed for so long I wanted him to stop. It echoed throughout the entire prison. And then he did.

I know what they did to people there. I dare not speak of it. Its in-humane, what they do to us. Yet I know, they aren't human anymore. Every morning, I wake up, and those yellow eyes would be staring at me. Always holding those abnormal rifles. I sometimes saw the one with red eyes, carrying a shotgun. Nonetheless, it was disturbing.

They feed me once a day. A small, broken bowl full of what they called "nutritional organic fluids". They also gave me a can of "Dr. Breen's Private Reserve". Purified water. They put something in it, it made you forget things. My best friend Riley drank it at City 17. He didn't remember who I was. I never drank it. Always thought about it, though.

There was a time when I thought about joining the Civil Protection force. Better rations, a nicer apartment. It would've been better than what the Combine was willing to give me as a citizen. Though I knew it wasn't worth it. Turning against my own race, just as Breen did. I couldn't, even if I did want to.

After spending most of my life in the middle, I decided to take a side. I started to think about the Resistance. Many of my friends joined the Rebels, I started to want to as well. To be free, to be able to stand up for yourself and make a difference.

I was first contacted by Barney, the role model of the Resistance. A very strongly-willed guy, yet always joking around. He was a good leader. We left in the middle of the night, Civil Protection skulking around, looking for anything out of the ordinary. We were in the plaza when we were spotted. Barney told me to run, and he hid in the shadows. They didn't notice him because of his cop uniform, he blended in well with the darkness.

I ran as fast as I could, a scanner keeping its light on me. I ran through an alleyway, and crashed through some crates. I burst through an apartment door, where some citizens were still awake. They closed the door behind me, and told me it was OK. They were part of the resistance.

For several days, I waited there. The Civil Protection were bustling through apartments, and I had heard reports of them in the Canals. I wouldn't be able to make my way out of the city, not while they were on to me.

I would've stayed there, and snuck out after a week or two. But someone came along that stirred everything up. Gordon Freeman. The citizens let him inside the apartment, and not soon after Civil Protection were trudging up the wooden staircase.

We all ran for our lives. They got Mary and Malcolm. Donny didn't make it, either. I heard the gunshots. I had made my way down to street level without being caught. A Civil Protection APC was racing past the street. They were distracted by someone on the rooftops.

I soon met up with my friend, John. He showed me a secret pathway to the canals. We knew there was a whole network of rebels that would help us if they could. We waited out until morning to be seen. We didn't want the Civil Protection to be on to us.

We reached the first outpost. The Rebels were tearing it down, we saw some running to the next station. We heard alarms coming from the citadel. The Civil Protection had discovered the rebel network. John and I followed the rest of them. Soon, we were the only ones left.

After being chased by the Civil Protection, we eventually made it out of the canals. We headed back into the outskirts of the city. There were old, abandoned apartments. We saw barely any other citizens. Civil Protection activity was still pretty high. We saw them walking through the streets, guarding the old buildings and some of the checkpoints. John told me the only safe way out was through "The Tunnel", an underground bomb shelter. It was the only place the Combine didn't know about.

We snuck from house to house, looking for the entrance to the complex. It was supposedly used by the Resistance. We hadn't heard anything about them using it, but John figured it was the only way to go.

It was nasty down there. It smelled like vomit and decay. We saw corpses of refugees. I guess we were lucky. We crept through the darkness, with only patches of light to guide us. I think we had an angel on our shoulders. We heard occasional moans and broken growls. We weren't sticking around to find out what they were. But as luck would have it, it found us.

We found a flare box, with a single flare inside of it. We heard the moans and growls getting closer. I then felt something behind me. John lit the flare, and our hearts stopped. There were zombies all around us. We heard one of them growl so loud, we jumped and dashed down the tunnel. John held the flare, and I followed what light I could see from it. We sprinted through the complex, desperately looking for a way out. Finally, we reached the Light of God.

A small ladder with an open hatch, and a beaming white light coming from the surface. That's what saved us from them. Or so we thought. John went up first, I followed him close behind. The flare was the last thing I saw before I closed the hatch. I thought the worst was over.

I soon found myself on the ground, with blood flowing out through my nose, and a slight amount of blood from my mouth. I was hit in the face with an AR2. I thought it was John, until I saw two blue eyes staring at me, pulling me off the ground and onto my feet. They were dragging John across the floor into a dropship, and they surrounded me, guns at the ready. We had been caught.

We weren't sure how long they had followed us. We didn't even know how long we were in The Tunnel. A day maybe? Several hours? It didn't matter. Days went on. I can't recall what they did to me. Beat me. Electrified me. They tried to get anything to prove that I was part of the Resistance, and anything to help them.

They should've killed me. I had nothing to hide, and nothing I knew could help them. They threw me in this cell like cowards. They took John's life, and soon they'll take mine. But it won't be easy. I will escape from this cell. I will escape from this prison, and I will retaliate against the Combine.

I am a human being, and we all have a little Rebel in us.

This is the third first person story in a row. I wonder if this is a reflection of how we see ourselves – standing up against the evil aggressor. Maybe that's why the HL series is so successful. Anyway, back to this story.

I enjoyed it. I felt I was part of the scene and liked how some of the things were described, especially the "Light of God".

It's a little depressing but that's fine as the subject matter demands it.

Definitely a good story.

Riding Combine

By Kajo Nagyeri

Dr. Garcia was alive. On his knees, he finally calmed down a bit and tried to think clearly. The cold salty air meant, that he was near the seashore. But where exactly, he just couldn't tell. He did not even know what time it was, for the gloomy blueish fog wrapping all around him made it impossible to see anything further than a few meters. It could be 5 a. m. in the morning, noon, or 11 p. m. He did not know.

Neither was he aware of the time that passed since the Combine attacked. A few hours? A few days?... ..Damn this weather!... The attack was quick. He was in his office at Black Mesa East when they came. Fighting was futile. Too many Combine, too many Combine...

"Let's see, what do I have here..." thought Garcia. He had jeans on, a blue sweatshirt, his white laboratory lab coat, a few pencils, a can of beer in his pocket, three chocolate snack bars and-, no that's it. No weapon. No radio. Nothing. Returning in his condition wouldn't be wise, especially unarmed. But where to go? There was enough water in the streams of the nearby forests, but Garcia was experiencing excruciating pain due to his empty stomach.

"Maybe near the along the beach, there will be some sort of settlement, or a small Combine station. There I could somehow steal some food, a gun and maybe even some sort of a communication device." speculated Garcia. Then, after eating one of the snacks, he carefully went out the room he was in. He presumed to be in a shed near the research facility, at the forests.

But he wasn't. Dr. Garcia was walking on a metal surface. Not far away were towers with blue and red lights on them and buildings of the size of the ones in Black Mesa East. But where could he be? He did not know about any such facility. He carefully examined this peculiar location and came to the shocking conclusion - Dr. Garcia was aboard of a huge, a gigantic ship.

"Hello?" No answer came.

The top deck was empty, or to be more precise, empty of life. All around lay dead Combine soldiers. Garcia was alone in the middle of a cemetery. A cemetery floating on the Ocean in the middle of nowhere.

The strange things were the wounds on them. On the size of an ashtray in the middle of their stomach. On each of them exactly on the same spot.

A new weapon developed by the Resistance?

As was Garcia exploring deck after deck, more and more soldiers all with the same type of wound on the exactly same spot were to be found. As if they were trying to *hide*. Now this was nonsense. Bullshit. Combine don't hide. Never. But this...

The cabins indicated, that the *Adonis*, as could be read on the towels and teaspoons was built and formerly used by humans. Garcia found everyday stuff like jewelry, books, letters. The Combine probably killed the people and then threw them into the sea. No, this doesn't make sense. They would use them as Stalkers or something else. Something was not right. Maybe the Captain's log could bring more light into this mystery. But it didn't.

At all.

The human log was full of official and non-official entries in this manner:

...weather clear. Changing course to 5 degrees north north west...

...ice party tonight. James drunk as hell. I flirted a lot with Domino, God, I like her black hair...I invited Domino over for a drink...

...nowhere Combine for over a week. Dr. Sanchez was right, they avoid this place. Everyone is in good mood. A few more expeditions and then we will send the report to Dr. Vance about the discovery...

...today I danced with Domino and looked at the stars...

"What? People seemed sure happy. But wait a sec, what is this place? And what discovery? And why the hell are there no logs about the Combine attack?" said Garcia aloud to himself. Being all alone in this miserable place was starting to creep him out.

The Combine log was even more confusing.

...human ship found. No one on board (Oh, fuck this.). Taking the ship to Lost Coast harbor in City 17...

...soldiers appear dead. First one by one. Initiating search for possible human group on ship...

...it is everywhere. Nowhere to run. Not enough ammunition. Resistance futile. Using hunters...

...no Hunters left. Requesting reinforcements and Advisors...

"Damn. So the people were somewhere outside Combine rule, somewhere, where Combine don't go. Like some sort of Ravenholm, but people seemed to enjoy it. They went on some expedition. Then nothing. Where are they? On the expeditions? But then someone would've stayed on board... ...so much for the people. The Combine on the other hand had far more problems.

So hunters didn't work. They even wanted help from an Advisor."

Advisor.

"Must have been something really bad. Maybe people defeated the Combine and then went away? Nonsense. Hmmm."

"What is this?" Garcia asked and looked at the small display near the logs. Twas the navigation system. It was set on auto pilot. Without the necessary code it would be impossible to manipulate it or to get access to the destination data. But it wasn't like Garcia would try and play the Captain. One man can't maneuver such a huge ship.

The impact quick at 4 a. m. Garcia was trying to stay awake from the fear of meeting the same fate as the Combine, but nothing happened. He looked out of the window. The right front side was a wreck, *Adonis* went straight into a cliff.

Mainland, finally. Maybe there Garcia could find some help and a way to get back to the Resistance.

Garcia found some edible food, a rucksack, and stuff, but had problems deciding on which weapons to take with him.

"The AR2 and Magnum were good for distances, but the crossbow as well. And what if he needed an RPG? Huh...Who cares?" said Garcia and decided on the crowbar and a shotgun.

The air and the fog didn't change a bit. The land was even more barren than the metal surface of the Adonis.

After three days of looking for some sort of life between wastelands and woods, Garcia gave up. He didn't know what to do. The communication on the ship did not work. Here was nothing. Before Garcia felt asleep, he decided on returning to the ship and try to build a new teleport. Maybe in a few months he could even get somewhere more civilized. This solitude may cost him till then his mind.

Walking back, Garcia spotted a very weak road, almost impossible to see. He tracked it and on the dawn of the next day he came across a great old Victorian-style house. Near it was a smaller structure. It looked similar to the Combine, but was different. But what was behind the buildings was of most surprise. Surrounded by thick walls a few Combine soldiers *together* with humans were working on the construction of a gigantic airship. Or air-city to be more precise. All the workers were chained. Together. Even an Advisor was lifting large metal rods with its telekinetic abilities.

"What the hell..." and then he understood. Both, the human and the Combine were held here as slaves. Slaves for some sort of aliens. They looked like robots, but they were more like soft-bodied creatures with armor. Taller and wider than men, with long rod-like weapons. There were not many of them, since only they had weapons and here was nowhere to run. As Garcia wanted to get back, he felt the strangest feeling, he has ever felt. He could see things he never saw, smell scents from other planets and hear the voices of unknown beings. The Advisor was talking to him telepathically.

"Look, worthless human, you don't like me and I don't like you. But you have to release me. In the human structure on top is a small device the size of a matchbox. Fetch it and free me with it and I may consider of not killing your pity comrades, but bestowing them with dignity in some of the Cities, filthy human." were the thoughts of the Advisor.

"Who are these *things*?"

Garcia felt the reluctance of the Advisor to answer, but after a while (and a few hits from the whip of its guard) it replied: "Gadums. One of the neighboring empires of us, Combine."

"There are *more* of your sort!?"

"Listen, they took me down because I underestimated them. But help me and you will be rewarded. Now go!"

The strange feeling experienced by the communication ceased. Garcia sat on the grass and thought for a while. Then he stood up with a smile on his face.

KMA, he whispered.

So there were more of them in the Universe. And not better, maybe even worse. *Great.*

At night he managed to get near the house. He had a no plan. But he had the moment of surprise. And a Master's degree form the MIT. Analyzing calmly under harsh circumstances was part of his job, a part of himself. And everyone has some weak point, even these aliens. These heavily armored aliens. Wait a minute... ..heavy armor equals soft body...

...

The Gadums were chasing after Garcia and surprised to see some of them wounded. Garcia knew where to aim, it were the places with the thinnest armor. Under it they were jelly.

Garcia managed to lead the Gadums into the opposite direction and returned quietly to the buildings. He took the device described by the Advisor and went to the backyard. People were scared and at the same time amazed.

It turned out that they were the people from Adonis. The place seemed worth giving a shot because of the suspiciously small number of Combine in the area. Looks like Combine were loosing one soldier after another in this place and after a while chose to go round of the area till the situation with the Resistance grew calmer and they had more soldiers available.

Garcia went to the Advisor.

The first thing everyone in Black Mesa East ought to know about the Combine was that the Advisors were the most dangerous of them. Little was known about them, except that they may be the masterminds behind the Combine Empire. Seeing one of them tight with chains and cables made the impression of invulnerability of Advisors in Dr. Garcia's mind fade.

"Good, now press its button." said the Advisor telepathically to Garcia. But to its surprise he climbed on top of it, as on a horse, pulled its long hands to himself as if they were harnesses and with the them in his left hand and the shotgun in his right, he said to the Advisor: "KMA. Kiss my ass. I don't trust you. Now first, you'll help me free these people with your abilities, then we'll deal with the monster aliens. Don't forget to destroy this thing you were building. Don't really like the look of it. And then we'll make a nice long flight to some normal place. With no Combine. Either this, or I'll blow your head away."

The Advisor was furious with anger, but calmed down in a moment and agreed. It had time. Sooner or later, it would think of some way to get rid of this pathetic little human. But til then, it had to play the obeying hostage.

As strange and weird as it may seem, Dr. Garcia had a great means of transportation to his use and had the Advisor under control at the same time.

Garcia pressed the button and the chains fell of the Advisor. Both of them were nervous and anxious - the Advisor was unsure as to how to approach this crazy man and Dr. Garcia did not know whether the Advisor would stay calm.

After finishing everything Dr. Garcia wanted form the Advisor, he flew on its back away to

the direction of City 17. Garcia's mind was full of pictures of what was and what may happen.

The Advisor defeated the jelly aliens violently, roaring, cruelly.

The Advisor may finish *Garcia* violently, roaring, cruelly...

Garcia knew he would eventually die, since the Advisor would betray him in some way. Those things were too cunning and sneaky. But up till then, he enjoyed outwitting one of them and flying on its back.

But instead of concentrating on the past and future all the time, the doctor had to smile.

Riding Combine.

Dr. Garcia was Riding Combine.

You have got to love the final situation – a human riding a Combine Advisor! However, I felt the story had been concocted just so this could happen. Of course, that's how a lot of stories are written but I shouldn't feel that way. It should all feel natural.

I'm still completely in the dark about how the character got onto the ship, the same goes for how he got from the ship onto the land, especially with a damaged ship and a cliff.

However, all that can be forgiven. What I can't accept is the introduction of a new species. I'm not sure whether this is technically breaking canon but it's not what the competition was about.

Curtain Call

By Patrick Wilson AKA foxholeboy

Jeremy Hen lied under the abandoned train clutching his SMG as he held it to his chest. He was desperately trying to control his breathing; if the Combine heard him the best he could hope for was a savage beating to the death by stun sticks. If he was unlucky they may take him to be processed into one of those... he didn't want to think about it, all he wanted to focus on was keeping himself quiet until the right moment. He prayed in his head to a God he was losing faith in to help him calm down. If it were before the cascade it may have worked. He remembered being backstage before a performance and praying he would keep his cool, remember his lines and not trip over the stage like the time he performed Macbeth. He knew he should have called it the Scottish Play; the rumours of the curse must have been true. What use was faith now, your wits are all you have, and reliance on yourself and others is all you have.

He suddenly snapped out of his daydreaming about his theatrical days and spiritual beliefs, angry at his mind wondering. He had to focus on the plan, staying silent, waiting for his moment. He couldn't blame himself though. Remembering his life before the cascade was about all he could do to keep himself from turning a gun on himself. He missed seeing a good piece of theatre, creativity abounding he could loosen the shackles of reality and watch anything happen on the stage. He took even more joy in giving that sense of enjoyment to other people, being a starring actor in a lead role. You won't catch a theatre not bombed out of existence these days, combine don't hold much appreciation for art it appears, nor would you ever catch a drama on the T.V. The most you could hope was that Dr. Breen happened to quote some literature in his propaganda broadcasts. That's about all that art means to them, another means of manipulation. The resistance weren't much better he thought. The height of our artistic prowess was graffiti on the walls. Were we doing anything different to the combine? They were both propaganda, trying to get supporters on their side, it's all manipulation whatever the cause for it. Art shouldn't need to have a purpose to exist; its reason is expression alone.

Why bother he thought, why bother complaining about something that couldn't be changed. The only way we can go back is to fight, the mission must be completed. It's almost like being back on stage; everyone playing their part, towards one big production to make the audience cheer with joy by the end. Survival is humanity's art, the art that sets us apart from all other races.

Jeremy snapped out of his day dreaming as he heard a train coming. It was Breen's train; he was coming back from City 27. The audience were taking their seats. It was time for his starring role to begin. Jeremy needed to wait for his moment to pull the pin on his grenades and drop them on the track as the train passed. Killing Breen would give the people the courage they needed to rally and fight the combine. Jeremy put down the SMG beside him ready to activate his grenades when a bright light blinded him. Jeremy was disorientated but he knew what had happened. A scanner had flashed him. Still blind, he felt himself being dragged from under the train. As he regained his vision he looked up to see a combine elite staring down at him before bashing his head with the end of his AR2. In his last moments of consciousness he heard the Elite reporting to his superiors.

“Final sweep complete, one hostile found what are my orders?”

“Send him to processing; we are running low on stalkers”

Lights fade out, curtain call.

For essentially an A4 piece of text I feel Patrick has done a great job bringing elements of the character and the Half-Life universe together.

I'd happily read more like it and may even have a competition based around the length and the concept of a characterisation piece.

Well done Patrick.

All along the watchtower

By Berjan Been

Jean briefly scanned the skyline before returning his attention to the procession in the street below. They had arrived ten minutes ago and had been a welcome change to the unsettling quiet of the last hour. Not that the constant sounds of gunfire and explosions had gone away, but for the past hour the only thing on the skyline had been some distant hunter-choppers.

The group was nineteen people strong and three more were acting as scouts. They carried two large metal crates between them and traded places to ease the burden. All of them were carrying backpacks filled with more equipment. They were moving their base to a new position and without a working vehicle this had to be done on foot. No doubt many things got left behind.

He looked up again. Smoke and fire bellowed up from the city. A few dots moved from the citadel. With his binoculars he made out an aerial convoy. Two gunships and three dropships with infantry containers. He noted it down, tracked them to some far part of the city and guessed the location. He then informed their radio operator through a can on a string.

The rebels in the street were making headway. They'd taken a break earlier and were now picking up the pace again. He tried to find the scouting group, but to no avail. The main group was close to the crossroad and by now a scout should have been waiting. Their leader had noticed it too and had everyone looking for cover. Too late. A blue flash cut across the street and one someone holding a side of a crate collapsed. Ammo spilled over the street, the others just scattered.

Jean grabbed his rifle and tried to find his Combine counterpart. Weapons fire broke loose closer-by signaling that Combine soldiers had started pouring into the street. A flash of blue betrayed the Combine sniper. He was hidden in the darkness, but by the light of day his contour stood out enough in the open window. His instincts took over, many years after they had been drilled into him. A squeeze on the trigger, the shot only audible to him. Realign, shoot again, just to make sure.

He shifted to help the rest of the rebels, but they had already been overrun. Quickly and methodically the soldiers shot the wounded through the head. They attached some explosives to the crates retreated to a safe distance and let the ammunition do the cleaning up for them. Not long after they left, oblivious to the ten men in the building nearby.

For a long time the bullets would go of inside the fires that consumed the group of rebels and Jean returned his eye to the sky, noting artillery launches and aerial activity.

I had to double check that the end really was the end. I felt it was more of a descriptive text and didn't feel much emotion or empathy for the character.

Besides the addition of some HL references, I didn't believe I was reading a story set in the Half-Life universe.

Guide

By Jack Skelhon aka Major Banter

To guide; *antonym* – mislead (to lead or guide wrongly; lead astray.)

The stink of meat still filtered through CB-214's filters. He watched carefully as the Hunters scoured the area for any trace of the dissident, but there was no point. His boot prints cut into the sprays of gore that littered the street.

This human was no different from the rest. They were simply lucky. Apparently.

214 didn't believe in luck. Overwatch certainly didn't. He nodded to the other soldiers in his squadron and began to make his report.

Naturally, some humans weren't so fortunate, and this one would follow suit. Overwatch demanded it.

*

“I can't say I count myself lucky” muttered Stack. Hoisting his weapon further up his chest, he retched yet again. “This stuff – it's literally shi-”

“Shut it.” The interruption came quietly. They stopped, Stack rigidly standing to attention, his guide with a fist clenched and a MP7 cinched around his torso.

Waist deep in sewage.

He couldn't help it. Bile rose in his throat, and his eyes watered. The *stench* scoured his nostrils. Years of untreated, assorted drainage was in this channel and mixed into it were various, wonderful artifacts such as bloated headcrabs and rotting bodies that drifted past Stack, leaving an almost visible miasma of rotten flesh.

Suddenly Stack's gag reflex subsided, to be replaced by something much worse.

His stomach felt like a bag of water.

The slightest of sounds that Stack hadn't heard over the sloshing of sewage.

A scanner.

Guide was absolutely still. Then his hand began to slowly open, like a flower. Five fingers. It tilted ninety degrees forward, and he began to lower himself into the gunk. The soft pinging of the Scanner echoed off the concrete walls. It grew louder, and began to pierce Stack's ears. That wasn't a scanner. This was something else. He dropped to his knees slowly and steadily, feeling wet sludge slide up his body. He reflexively shivered.

The pinging became deafening; sonar. Then it became a warbling drone. A very recognisable drone.

Stack heard his guide mutter “Synth Dropships” - and was instantly proven correct. Breezing along on massive thrusters, the Synth flew over the concrete canal, cones of flame casting a bright blue light for a scant second. The shadow – shadows – passed Stack, causing the bleached sun to flicker. Troop transports. And no small number either.

After a few moments as the pinging of the sonar receded, Guide turned to his charge. “We don't have much time.” Stack nodded, and began to haul himself upright. “Lead the way.”

*

“So they worked?” Jason, technician of Station Twenty-Six stood amazed. Throwing his AR2 aside, Guide nodded.

“Perfectly. The masks included.” Jason whistled. “Had a couple of dropships buzz us; and either they didn't care or the IFFs still work as well.” This time, Jason frowned.

“How long ago, in which direction?” Guide stretched, and began to unlatch the Combine Overwatch mask.

“Hell if I know. North-ish. About twenty, thirty minutes ago.” The concern on the technician's face was clear.

Stack watched from the gantry over the sludge, biting his lip. This was far beyond him; Guide was the ex-Metrocop. Stack himself been on the edge of City 17 when Nova Prospekt was breached, and by the time the Citadel was alert and 'the uprising' had begun, he was crawling out of the City. He had to get out, and fast. It was in the remains of Station Twenty he'd met Guide – a grizzled, near-broken shadow of a man. His Metrocop uniform was soaked in someone's blood and he had tear tracks through the grime on his face. As the clatter of gunfire had intensified and detonations rocked City 17, Guide's eventual offer to join him in attempting to reach White Forest seemed a sensible idea.

Bar the fact that Stack had no idea where White Forest was, what significance it had or why Guide wanted to go there. The countryside was blasted wasteland, everyone knew that.

Except Guide.

Stack kept watching the man. He'd killed the two soldiers with his MP7 by sheer luck, they'd stolen the AR2s with a vague knowledge of how they worked. They'd donned the suits, taped them up and moved through the canals at a lightning pace. The bellowing of the Citadel and constant machine-gun of explosions echoing from miles away had motivated their flight, their scurrying from a fight. At night, trying to sleep at opposite ends of whatever pipe they had crawled into, Stack watched the light-show of Combine plasma batteries and human RPG fire – the precision lightning and the lazy fireballs etched onto Stack's retinas, and his comrade's gaunt face. Neither of them were soldiers, or emotionless automations. Just another two refugees.

“Stack!” He fumbled his AR2, and flinched. Startled from his reverie, he felt his face burn. Trying to hold his AR2 in what he hoped was the correct way, Stack walked over to Guide's piercing glare, keeping his eyes on where his feet trod. “Jason's been in contact with the Resistance.”

Jason nodded, and brought a stained notepad up to his face. He squinted.

“Yeah. Overwatch are desperate to catch someone codenamed 'Anti-Citizen One' before the Citadel goes critical.”

“Critical?” Jason cocked an eyebrow. Guide glanced at him, and shrugged.

“About eighteen hours ago the Citadel suffered some sort of massive core overload. I have absolutely no idea what caused it, who Freeman is or why the Combine are intent on letting it happen, but there you go.” Guide began to wander off, while Jason picked up a chair. “Come on.”

They walked into a separate annex. An A2 sized map covered one wall, while an

ancient computer buzzed to itself.

“Guide noticed it while you were moving here. A huge explosion lit up the evening sky, and then this morning some really crazy stuff started happening. You been paying attention?”

Stack muttered an excuse. He generally didn't look behind himself. Jason's brow creased yet again. Premature furrows etched a map on his brow.

“You and Guide have – at my estimate, and we're well out of the way here for decent information – less than half a day before the Citadel either explodes or a portal gate opens. Both of those options will clear a significant exclusion zone. Forty clicks.”

On the map was a massive red circle. It nearly clipped the edges of the sheet. Comfortably within it lay the entirety of City 17 and Station Twenty-Six. Stack felt a deep, deep trickle of nausea sit in his stomach.

“It's basically a nuclear detonation. EMP included.” Stack was silent. If he hadn't have met Guide, he'd be condemned now. Hell; if they didn't start walking, they would be condemned regardless. The red circle glared at him – there was at least four kilometres of hazardous terrain and Combine patrols still to work through. That would take time. And equipment. Stack spun on his feet, only to find Guide was entering the room silently.

“Jason, thanks for everything.” He turned to Stack. “We've got to move. Now.”

“Why?”

“A radio report just came in, Jason. They're moving to load evacuees onto the trains.”

*

CB-214 stayed silent. The sniper next to him kept one eye down his rifle scope, the other covered with his hand. The blue glow of the sniper's night vision illuminated his glove, picking out every crevice and curve.

One of the hunters crooned to itself, some way below CB-214. The Citadel behind them lit the darkening sky with an evil glow, the tumult of the sky casting a dull orange light, mediated by the yellow, ash corrupted, diffused sun.

The Combine evacuation of City 17 was well under way, and the human population had reportedly fought through the blockades successfully, transporting themselves on packed trains to areas beyond the imminent shockwave that would create yet another wasteland.

But his prey was still within the exclusion zone, and thus so was he.

CB-214 waited without concern. He had his orders.

*

Stack's lungs felt like they were being torn apart. Sweat filled his boots.

“Faster!” yelled Guide. Stack couldn't possibly do faster. He wavered in his pace, filth caking his trousers, weighing him down. “Concentrate on your breathing!”

Guide was ploughing ahead – and beyond Guide lay the weighing station. A concrete edifice that dominated the skyline – and in its broken windows stared the eye of the storm; the Citadel's last breath. Stack, on the other hand, had none left. He felt faint – his head

swam. He hauled himself through the sludge. One step at a time. It covered his face, and the plumes Guide's created dwarfed Stack's. He was metres ahead.

Jumping onto a ladder, Guide was finally able to haul himself from the muck that had been his life and saviour for the past three days. He looked for his struggling companion, and felt utterly exhausted.

It had been difficult for them both.

The boy's face constantly carried both hope and fear – the latter whenever he looked at Guide. He obeyed without question, he did what he was told. Guide's face remained inscrutable as he pulled Stack from the sewage. Stack's eyes were closed.

As Stack, shuddering, gasped for breath, Guide took stock. The Citadel would detonate soon. Very soon. They'd covered barely two clicks in thirty minutes, through thick sludge and debris.

The Combine weren't a problem – yet. Guide walked over to Stack, and pulled him up by the armpits. He collapsed onto Guide.

Grunting, Guide quickly laid him down. Not now. Definitely not now.

“Stack, what the hell is wrong with you?” he muttered.

Placing a hand either side of Stack's face, he moved his right hand to Stack's neck. A pulse; fast, but slowing. He moved the hand to the boy's forehead. No sweat. Opening Stack's mouth firmly, he stuck his fingers inside and grabbed Stack's tongue. Bone dry. Dehydration. Damn!

But so what? He was two kilometres from the edge of the exclusion zone. Two kilometres between near-certain death and near-certain injury.

He stood. He gripped his MP7. He sighed. Guide just wasn't that callous.

Crouching, Guide grabbed Stack's bottle, and jammed it into the waiting mouth. Shutting his tired eyes he heard coughing and choking, and felt flecks of spittle on his face. Good. Time was short.

But...something wasn't quite-

CB-214 felt the sniper move slightly, adjusting his stance.

Guide saw a faint blue light through his eyelids.

The laser guide of the rifle sliced through the air.

Trigger finger tightening, the sniper lined up his sights.

Stack opened his eyes.

Combine rifles are remarkably quiet; CB-214 barely flinched as the weapon fired with a harsh *crack*, and cycled its bolt.

Stack felt a spray of warm liquid spatter onto his face. A short cry, and a thump of something heavy. Spitting out the water bottle, he was blinded by scarlet blood running into his corneas. He cried out, flinching wildly.

His head thumped with his heartbeat. Sweeping his lead weight of a hand across his eyes, Stack did the only thing his body told him to do.

He rolled. Fast.

His head pounded. The laser moved to track him as he thundered over the concrete. Stabbing pains in his ribs and kneecaps erupted as he sawed into his flesh with nails, splinters and sharp concrete.

CB-214 saw the human roll below their position. No matter.

*

Through a vague, agony filled haze, Guide felt the pain in his hand turn to steadily to numbness. Blood trickled in rivulets under his Metropolice uniform. The majority of it soaked into the fabric. His shoulder joint was shattered by the plasma round; fragments of scorched bone were strewn across his chest. Blood flowed freely from the joint, welling up and spilling onto the ground. He tried to lessen the pain by rolling slightly onto his right arm. Rotating his chest and turning his head, Guide saw through the clotting blood on his eyelids a blurred shape rise unsteadily. The pain was...incredible. Outrageous. He blacked out.

“GUIDE!” Stack screamed. Swearing blindly, his heart hammered. It had happened so suddenly – they had been so damn close! He shrieked a curse until his throat felt raw.

The reflection of the dying Citadel was reflected in Guide's blood.

A growing crimson pool formed around the pathetic, sprawled human. He waited. The Citadel's groans echoed off the cliff faces and flat concrete surfaces. The metal girders supporting a few dilapidated storage buildings creaked, flakes of rust drifting in and out of the ash. Guide cried out, piercing through the seclusive silence.

There was a blur, and a deep, resonant, bass thump of three synthetic, chitinous legs cracking four feet of poured concrete.

A Hunter.

Stack heard the creak of its joints, and *that* hideous, low crooning – and then felt the impact of its rear leg smashing him in the torso. It cracked his MP7 in two. Stack flew backwards, smashing into the floor, the two halves of the MP7 that saved his sternum from shattering skittering away.

His sight blurred; winded and unable to breathe, he scabbled around on the concrete. He tore his fingernails out in the throes of agony and terror.

It spun around, metallic irises contracting, bathing Stack in a sickly turquoise glow. The reverberations of its footfalls vibrated Stack's bones as it approached. It stood absolutely still, irises clicking and adjusting constantly.

A low croon.

Stack attempted to control his hyperventilating, and tried to control himself – only to shriek as the Hunter raised its leg.

The Hunter suddenly echoed him; flailing, its foreleg coming down violently at a sickening angle. It hit the concrete with the sound of a gunshot, the joint splitting open and spraying artificial blood over Stack. It missed him by inches.

It staggered drunkenly, scraping bare bone across the concrete and bellowing,

flabby folds of pallid flesh flapping as it floundered into a rusty supporting girder. There was a grim, lonely creak, and the girder buckled, bringing several tonnes of decayed steel down onto the concrete with a reverberating *smash*.

CB-214's last thought was not one of regret or remembrance. He died, crushed by a Hunter's stumbling, screaming Guide's name silently into his re-breather.

Stack looked up, hands on the concrete. Coated in dust, sludge and gore, he shut his eyes. His heart hammered. He felt an unfathomable terror. He felt one final spike of agony.

The Citadel brightened suddenly, casting inky shadows where dull sepia had laid before. A deep rumble coursed through the ground moments later.

Guide turned his head into the light, his silhouette casting a lengthening shadow in the piercing, unholy glare that pulsed into his retinas.

Then, silence.

“So....Corporal Shepard. I see you were not willing to...ah...disappoint, me?”

I have mixed emotions about this story. I have to admit that I am confused by two things. How did CB-214 die and what's the connection with Shepard? Even a re-read didn't help.

I did enjoy the story but didn't really like the style. That's not a criticism, as I am not qualified to critically analyse writing style, just an expression of taste.

I feel the author has tried to impress the reader with his ability, rather than telling the story in the most suitable way.

Anyway, it's definitely an interesting read.

Night Patrol

by Stratofarius M

Author's Note:

This story is really short, and for one reason, I wanted it to be. Started as I was playing with a friend of mine in a Half Life 2 Roleplay server on Garry's Mod, and I imagined these two units talking about a certain matter. I don't really think it will win, as it's not my best-written one- yet.

*

The sun finally descended on the horizon, hiding behind the looming structure that was the Citadel. The usual dawn commotion began on the plaza, citizens running to their homes- no one wanted to be found out on the street at night- some say that the wandering citizens are killed by alien monsters that roam through the city during the night, killing innocent citizens with their mighty big claws—

“Bullshit.” Said 00823, his voice morphed through his mask’s vocoder.

I sighed. He didn’t even let me finish my story:

“Everything you are talking now is pure bullshit my friend.” He said, spinning his pistol, looking at a group of citizens that immediately stopped chatting when they noticed who was observing that.

“You do know that word is an audio violation.” I said. When he’s not near any superior units, 00823’s has a rather... dirty tongue.

“Who cares? It’s almost time for our night patrol.”

My name is 00942. At least that’s the name our Benefactors gave to me. I am a proud member of the Civil Protection Service of City 17, and today, is night patrol day. Every day of the week, a pair of units is chosen to perform the night patrol on the most dangerous area of the city- the CCH Square, a place surrounded by Combine Civil Housing buildings. That means, lots, and lots of angry citizens. Some even died during a night patrol. But me? Me and 823, we are night patrol experts:

“Hey, did you hear about 91745?” He turned around to me as we approached the gate to the square, “Looks like command found out something dirty about him.”

“Listen, I just want to get this night patrol done, and call it a day.”

“Don’t you mean a night?” 823 chuckled.

“Very funny.“ I pulled up my sidearm; one looking at this scene might think I was going to shoot my friend, “Sidearm loaded?”

“Yep.”

“Stunbaton charged?”

“Yes.” 832 shook his stunbaton, sparks flying out of the top.

“Medical supplies checked?”

“Sure.” He said, pointing to his backpack with a red cross on it.

“Let’s get this night patrol done.” I said, opening the gate to the square.

The light of the moon and the leaves falling from the trees gave the square a rather eerie look. Some citizens, skinny and on their normal outfits, were either laying against the wall, in groups, or watching from their windows, alone. Everyone knew each other on that place- all the citizens from the four Civil Housing buildings formed some sort of group. Hey, we didn’t care- as long as they didn’t hurt us:

“What were you saying about 91745?” I asked, as we passed through a group of citizens that dispersed as soon as I set my eyes on them.

“Looks like he got it on with some citizens.”

“Got it on?”

“Yes. Did it. Shagged.”

He really couldn’t see my puzzled look behind the mask:

“... Had sex.”

“Oh!” I took a moment to realize what he just said, “Wait, rape?”

“Yes.” He nodded, “With a female citizen. Killed her after that.”

“And how did Command find out about that?” We stopped in the middle of the square, an evening’s breeze being blocked by our Kevlar suits.

“Apparently, the girl had a sister.” 832 said, “And she said that she was going to report him, to other units. 917 did it with her too. And threw her off a bridge.”

“Holy shit.”

“All it took was for the body to float down near an unit on patrol, a few exams... and 917’s fingerprints were found on her clothing.”

“H-hold on.” I tapped my chin- or at least, my mask’s chin, “So he took off his mask and his suit?”

832 nodded. I never noticed that he was shorter than I was:

“I never knew that.”

“Well, 917’s story made me a bit... mad, right?”

“W-what do you mean?” I was kinda... digesting the story, “Mad?”

“Yeah. The virtual reproduction simulation that Command rewards us is not that great.” 832 sighed, “It’s a machine after all. And we are still humans.”

“Are we?”

832 looked at me, well, I think he did:

“What do you mean?”

“Thinking about 917’s story... that’s not a real... human thing to do?”

“Ah, great, you started thinking again, 924.” 832 turned around, entering one of the Civil Housings, and I followed him, “Night patrols always make you think.”

“And what’s the bad thing about that?”

“You shouldn’t be doing that. Come on, we got a building to search.”

Night patrols were always like that. We chat, we search, we kill someone. 832 thought about gang-raping one of the female citizens that night. It really didn’t matter- after all, once we got back to the Nexus, we would simply forget everything we talked about, and become the usual normal units. It was just nice that we could have a chat during the Night Patrol.

It's interesting that the author doesn't think this story is as good as his other entry when I think the reverse. I enjoyed reading it more than the other, although the subject matter wasn't particularly nice.

I know people like to imagine what Metrocops talk about but generally I don't. I also think the addition of “virtual reproduction simulation” broke canon.

The concept of Metrocops chatting is definitely an area worth exploring but I believe we need to think really deeply about what they might talk about.

The Light

by Stratofarius M

Author's Note:

This story's style is written to look like an episode from the science fiction TV series, The Twilight Zone. Apart from that, it is a 100% original story.

*

You unlock this door with the key of imagination. Beyond it is another dimension: a dimension of sound, a dimension of sight, a dimension of mind. You're moving into a land of both shadow and substance, of things and ideas. You've just crossed over into... the Twilight Zone.

Today's story on the Twilight Zone is somewhat unique and calls from a different kind of introduction. The year is 2018. The world has been under control by an evil extraterrestrial empire known as the Combine. While some humans insist to rebel against the Combine, most of the remaining of Earth's population live in cities, controlled by the Combine, living all their lives, oppressed. Today we follow the story of a man living in City 17, who thinks he is walking to a normal day on his sad life. However, he is walking towards the Twilight Zone.

"Oh no, oh no, I'm going to be late!"

Jack was running down the plaza on City 17, the big screen on a pillar already transmitting speeches from Earth's administrator, Wallace Breen, and the gigantic Nexus, the symbol of the Combine's power, looming over the city. A few other citizens, some of them carrying ration packets with the Combine's logo on it, merely gave Jack a look, and resumed their almost zombie-like walk:

"Can't be late, if you're late, they beat you up, so, no, no, CAN'T be LATE!" he got a sudden boost when he saw a Civil Protection officer, the Combine's police, starting to close the door to the factory in which he worked, "NO! STOP! PLEASE, SIR, STOP!" and for the first time ever, a Civil Protection unit listened. He stopped as soon as Jack approached him, panting:

"Citizen." the unit said, his voice sounding more like a robot than an actual human being, "May I inquire the reason for your screaming?"

"I am deeply sorry sir." Jack said, catching his breath, "I accidentally overslept, sir, and I don't want to be late for the job. It's... it's my life, sir."

"U-hum." the unit said, crossing his arms, looking at him like a dad looks at the kid who just broke a window, "Well, it's a good thing that you arrived just in time. I was about to close the factory's door. Now, move in."

Jack smiled, well, at least attempted to smile. He entered the dark corridor leading to the

factory- the legend was that the corridor was built right through the middle of a church. He wouldn't be surprised if it was true, the Combine didn't care for race or religion. The door behind him closed with a loud noise. It was time to work.

Working at the Combine factory wasn't a really nice job, well, it was the only job you could have. It involved dealing with dangerous chemicals and with bodies- the working place wasn't really nice too, the dark, gloomy factory had already made a few citizens suicide on the body grinder. But by working there, you got a card, that saved you from a beating or two- and also gave you a proper house. It was either this, or living in the streets with the chance of being beaten to death rose to 200%. Jack worked at putting chemicals on the water- "and by God, if the Combine ever get you talking about that on the streets, you are officially dead" said his friend, Toot, well, that wasn't his REAL name, but Jack never had time to memorize it, and the nickname caught on- and also handling other chemicals that apparently were made for the Civil Protection units- "I wonder if they can find out if we put a bit on poison on those " said Toot once again.

That day, however, Jack was fucking tired. He wanted to do something different, for crying out loud, not doing the same every single time. So he made a deal with Toot- he was going to distract the units so that he could check the control room. The control room was always empty- they could see that, since there was a big window on the control room, so who was IN the control room, could see out on the factory. Toot agreed- only if he could have Jack's ration packet for the day. Toot was a very weird fellow. He was really pale, and he didn't seem the kind of guy who would be making fun of the Combine, more the kind of guy that would totally serve them. Jack really didn't care.

Toot began to fake a problem with the conveyor belt carrying the chemicals. Soon, some units were called to deal with the problem- and that was Jack's sign. Sneaking into the "employee's area"- at least that's what he thought it was- Jack slowly walked into an area where we saw something un-expected- a Civil Protection unit, without his mask. Much to his surprise, he looked absolutely human under that mask- but that wasn't what he was looking for. Sneaking through other doors, and getting deeper and deeper into the factory, he came to a conclusion:

"I'm TOO far away."

He was in the middle of what seemed to be a laboratory. Machines all around him were producing the chemicals that he used and sending them on conveyor belts- one of those conveyor belts had stopped, probably the one Toot was using. He then spotted something on the lab, something that really caught his eye. It looked like a round platform- there was a console near it, and it looked like something Toot was talking about on his usual rants:

"Someone told me it was a teleporter, and he also told me the Combine have a lot of those. Legend says, if you step on one of those, and press a button, you're teleported."

Well, it couldn't hurt to try. Jack walked slowly to the teleporter, but as soon as he touched the console, an alarm started sounding. Suddenly, the conveyor belts stopped, and some of the chemicals fell on the ground, the liquid spilling all over the floor. A Civil Protection unit stepped out of one of the doors, and it immediately started shooting at

Jack. His first reaction was to jump on the teleporter and press whatever buttons he could find. The thing closed, and the round platform started to raise. Suddenly, units stormed in the place, but one of them screamed something about shooting. There was a blinding light...

“Jack.”

An old, snake-like voice came out of nowhere. Well, Jack was in the middle of nowhere. For a second, he saw a man, wearing some sort of metallic suit, with brown hair and goatee (and some goggles) appear in front of him, but that one quickly disappeared. The sounds of people screaming “shut it down!”, “what’s going on Izzy?”, “something’s wrong with the connection” was all that he could hear. Then, the sounds stopped. And so did his movement. Then someone appeared in front of him. It was Toot. He appeared much older than he was, and he was wearing a blue suit and a tie. On his right hand, a briefcase:

“Mister Jack.” Toot’s voice was way more weirder than it was before. Every syllable was extended. Like a snake. “Your contribution, Mister Jack, was... really important. However, your... usefulness... has come to an end.”

An image appeared behind the man that he knew as Toots. It was the image of that same man he saw just a second ago. He was holding some sort of crowbar, banging on some wooden panels that were blocking a door.

“Your contribution... is also very valuable... for the future of my employers.”

The image disappeared, and he was now standing with the man in a corridor of doors:

“However, since you have... already entered statis ... you may not leave it. My employers... do not want some of this... information... leaked.”

A door at the end of the corridor opened. A bright light was coming out of it.

“You... will enjoy... your time here.”

Jack, suddenly, attempted to scream. But his body was suddenly thrust towards the bright light. And so began his permanent teleportation... into The Twilight Zone.

I quite enjoyed reading this story until the end. The idea of the G-man disguising himself just doesn't seem right. Also, I can't believe the character would go from obvious subservience to deciding to explore, it was too much of a jump for me, at least without some trigger.

I think the problem with this story is the ideas behind it more than the actual writing.

A Conflict of Species

By Mel Pettard

Looking back now on so much since that first encounter evoked by the Black Mesa incident, my mind is a maze of thoughts that now cannot decipher between reality and ones worst nightmares.

So much to take in, new and strange worlds, alien creatures, The Combine armies equipped with powerful weapons, portals that defy physics and time, what did it all mean? What sense or purpose, if any, was the driving force of so many encounters, battles and quests, my mind is a mess, I need to sort through the thoughts, and if possible make logic of it all.

The long drawn out face with deep set eyes was looking down on me, I remember the lab, the control tower and activating the start procedure, after that I'm not certain, strange images flashing from one unknown location to the next, and now looking into those eyes, was this face real or just one more seemingly unreal image.

Well Mr Freeman, you have seen and experienced more then any earth bound being and that alone qualifies you for the task that lay ahead. With these few words the image was gone, who was he? What task?

But for now the urgent need to get the hell out of here was paramount, with falling structures, fires and weird creatures transporting in and out at every point, the drive to get topside was pushing me ever upwards through the many floors and levels of this immense underground complex known as Black Mesa.

Eventually I reach the safety of ground zero, to my surprise a reception committee was in place ready to meet me, a lean looking woman draped in denim was standing close to a vehicle, in attendance was a robotic figure, loosely resembling an oversize dog. My name is Aylx and this is Dog, my father sent me to meet you, I will explain more as we travel, get in she said.

She talked about as fast as she drove, a million miles an hour, I did not take it all in at once, and it seems somehow her father had been monitoring the events at Black Mesa. It would appear her father's group had been studying alien activity within our system for some time, with the Mesa incident being the first actual touch down of alien source known. I was left wondering where I fit into all this, first the man with the briefcase, now this woman with the pet dog, who was her father and why did they want me?

Aylx said, it's best that we keep going it's dangerous to stop, alien beings were transporting in everywhere and she had promised to get me, Mr Freeman, safe and in one piece to her fathers headquarters, with that she slowed down and handed me a shotgun, adding don't wait to ask questions shot first. Signs of destructions where everywhere, the road was lettered with strange canisters, at times a thought I saw figures, stooped and staggering through the ruins of wayside buildings. Dog was acting as outrider clearing the road ahead often branching off to engage something unknown.

It was dark when we turned off the road to enter a tunnel leading to a small complex of buildings; it

seemed a safe place with endless gates and barricades closing behind us before we reach father's headquarters as Alyx called it. We were greeted by a slim looking figure with an artificial leg, having hugged his daughter he turned and greeted me, welcome Mr. Freeman no doubt you must be wondering what's going on. What's more to the point I replied, what do you want with me?

Well Mr. Freeman it would seem that you hold the key to a few vital questions, the aliens are flooding into our world via endless number of earth bound portals, our scanners and analysis indicate a single point of origin somewhere beyond our understanding. You Mr. Freeman are the link to both this origin and the reason for this invasion. Between the beginning of The Black Mesa incident and you're meeting with the G-Man, yes G-Man, for want of a better name, we know little of him, and we assume he works for the government, what government? What country or world we don't know, anyway between this time period you experienced the invasion from its first concept.

The Black Mesa was the first entry point and it did not all go according to alien plans, this first earth bound portal was very unstable with alien bodies transporting in and back out, within this confusion Mr. Freeman you were caught up in the portals initial miss function, along with the first alien wave you were transport back to its point of origin. Locked within your mind are both its location and the reason behind this massive incursion.

The fact that some unknown entity with seemly advanced understanding of portals has selected earth, would indicate to us some form of weakness, they must want something earth has to offer, they are not here just to kill and take over the world, there is a more meaningful goal to this invasion, one that we must uncover. So Mr. Freeman without any more waste of time we intend to tap your mind to discover what lies within its testimony.

I don't remember much of what happened next; having felt a sharp pain to the neck things became blurry followed by images of strange worlds and bodies of which I seemed to be an accepted part. A soft woman's voice with a matching smile slowly comes into focus; it was Alyx, drink this she said, sorry we had to put you out that way, but time is of the essences. The procedure, she added, was a success we now know the invaders are from a world called Xen, but more important we now understand the reason behind the invasion.

Xen and its ally worlds are themselves under attack, their resources are stretched and without the means to build mechanical weapons to support their over committed alien armies they will be overpowered, Earth has ample resources to build such support weapons. Xen's enemies known as The Combine have followed them to earth determined to stop them using our world's resources. We are trapped in the middle of two alien forces battling it out in our backyard; neither force will show any compassion for our world or its people. We also know from you Mr. Freeman that an area called the White Forest will be a major location for the two alien forces, this will be the key portal area to transport new weapons to Xen, and the forest is bound to be attacked by The Combine in an attempt to stop them completing their mission.

The bottom line Mr. Freeman is that earth has neither the means nor will power to unit against either of these invading forces, however, we now know, again thanks to you that Xen has no plans to colonize earth. Once it fulfills its need for weapons it will leave, on the other hand we also know that The Combine is an aggressive species bent on conquest of all new worlds.

We intend to pitch what forces we have against The Combine and our choice of battle field will be the White Forest, by engaging The Combine we hope to assist the Xen army to achieve its object and transport its weapons for defense of their home worlds. I looked at Alyx and then back to her father; they could read the apprehension that had now masked my face. Thanks I said, for all the detailed information, however, I am not sure I have any need for it, you have tapped what knowledge I have of both invading forces and I think my usefulness has expired.

Alyx was first to reply, your insight to the Xen aliens and the fact that they appeared to accept you during the initial Black Mesa incursion, could mean we have a chance to make contact and act together against a common enemy The Combine. Her Father, Eli Vance added, you see Mr. Freeman you are far more important then you realize. Our armada can be ready to go at short notice, but you are the single most important part of our force, and without you we have no chance of making allies of the Xen forces.

Eli's forces, the armada has he called it was a motley looking array, using any means of transport it called obtain and induce to get mobile, they traversed roads and countryside alike clearing corridors and eliminating any aggressive foe that crossed their path. We had no air cover, so being very wary of Combine attacks from above our forces were spread out and open road travel was restricted. However, it was deemed essential that I made first contact with the Xen forces ASAP, to this end Alyx, Dog and I forged ahead of the strike force using the Buggy and any open road we could utilize.

Again dog acted as outrider, it never ceased to amaze me just how fast Dog could travel, we would lose sight of him often, once he had made sure the immediate road ahead was clear he would then cut across country to come back on the next stretch of road that needed either clearing of checking out. This way we made quick work of reaching our destination. Another advantage Dog gave us was his keen sense of hearing which warned us of enemy aircraft, thus allowing us ample time to get off the road and take cover.

We reached the White Forest by day break well ahead of our main force, there was much evidence of pitched battles, discarded armor, weapons and strange looking machines lay scattered throughout the forest, in the distance we could hear a mixture of howling and weapon fire, as our aim was to make contact we continued on foot in the direction of the mayhem that lay ahead.

Bizarre machines were stalking the forest, robotic like on two legs firing what seemed to be a twisting source of energy that ignited in sound and light on contact. At first we could not see what these strange machines were engaging, but then I noticed that the same twisting source of energy was being fired back and in some cases hitting and disabling the two legged machines. We progressed further to see that the return fire was coming from the same form of machines; we were witnessing a battle between identical fighting forces in the form of robots.

Dog was straining at the bit to get involved, Alxy calmed him down by getting him to take cover and wait for her word to move on. We were perplexed, who was fighting who, obviously it had to be Xen against The Combine, but which side was Xen? We needed to make a decision, without any other clues I decided to assess who were the aggressors and which if any appeared to be taking a defensive role. The forces to our left appeared to be taking cover at every opportunity they were given ground slowly almost inch by inch, in opposition the right hand forces were far more

aggressive lunging forward and taking more hits. I concluded the force to our left were defending and more likely to be Xen forces guarding any approach to their super portal system.

We skirted to our left and were behind what we hoped were the Xen machines, Dog still needed to be restrained and Alyx now assigned him rear cover duty. We traveled what must have been a mile beyond the fighting factions until we reach a massive clearing, the clearing spanned almost to the horizon, no structures broke the view and the clearing looked new and completely lacking of undergrowth, down trees or fallen branches. Alyx broke the silence, where are they, I was expecting some huge complex, if the Xen forces are manufacturing those two legged fighting machines there must be facilities in the area. My mind was now full of images of Xen, much activity was taking place within the images, there was a great movement of material and it was all traveling downwards on platforms. Of course, Xen's industry is underground. I turned to Alyx and said fan-out, tell Dog to do the same and look for any ground opening. Needless to say Dog covered more ground in a minute then we would have in an hour, he finally stopped and looked in Alyx direction.

The entrance was small obviously meant as a minor access point; no doubt any major access was cancelled and operated from below. I turned to Alyx and told her that this is where I take over, there was no guarantee that she was going to be accept below and being no access for Dog it would be safer to take cover in the forest.

I lowered myself through the opening and found that I could easily descend via what appeared to be hand grips set within the walls, I soon reach a level that opened out, and from here I could see a series of rotating and descending platform disappearing deep below.

Many levels spanned the decent, with each level more activity was present until the lowest level was reached and a cataclysm of active abounded everywhere. The two legged machines were present in their hundreds of thousands; it was difficult to focus in any one direction when a voice low and aged broke the spell. The Freeman, we have been waiting, I turned to look. The figure was one I had seen only within my mind, I am Neyehem, Vortigaunt leader of the Earth bound Xen forces. You come with no time to spare, we have almost completed our task we need just two of your earth days to transport by portal our new weapons, these you have already encountered we call them Hunters in honor of man's roots on earth.

We can not sustain the battle above much longer, The Combine captured a division of our hunters which we are fighting to hold back, soon these will be reinforced with Elite Guards and our remaining topside Hunters will be overrun. Your Earth force is close at hand and we need its help buying us time to leave earth. We can assist with air cover, our air forces will be sacrificed to shield your land armada, we know we are leaving you to fight alone and your struggle against The Combine will be long and deadly, but if we succeed in defending our worlds we will be back to help The Freeman.

History tells use that the Earth Forces did hold back The Combine for one vital day, Xen reinforced it armies to successfully defend its worlds. The time is now close for their return.

I found that there was too much happening in the story, in fact it seemed to completely rewrite HL2 through to Ep2. Having Freeman speak is also a big mistake as this clearly breaks canon. I feel Mel tried

to do too much in too short a piece.

Thank you for reading

I hope you enjoyed the stories

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