

# Halo ODST: Descent into Darkness

By: Kevin Coryell

The trip to the 26 Draconis System had been a long one for the troops under my command. We had been on our way to Reach when we received new mission orders: we were now being sent to an outer colony to see whether it was still in one piece or if enemy forces held it, seeing as how communications had gone out. The last message from the colony relayed that they had seen Covenant ships approaching their world of Levosia.

We had bunked down only a few hours earlier, since upon arriving in the system we would be spending the last few "leisurely" hours busily preparing for our drop. It hadn't seemed like I had been asleep all that long when the ship's claxons sounded, waking us from our sleep in the rudest possible way.

*"Commander Rhelin to the bridge, Commander Rhelin report to the bridge!"* came blaring over the ship's intercom a moment later, as my squad of Orbital Drop Shock Troopers moved swiftly from their bunks and started dressing in their battle gear.

"Well, it seems Captain Reynolds wants to see me. Go prepare for the drop and once old Wash is finished with me, I'll be along to let you grunts in on what has gone FUBAR this time! Move out!"

I couldn't help but smile at the efficiency of the ODST troops under my command. So many people praised the Spartans, but in my opinion it was the ODST that had kept us from losing the war a long time ago. As my troops filed out, I made my way up towards the bridge of the converted luxury liner. The ship had once been a gambling yacht, taking the wealthy from planet to planet. The ship was known as the Trans-Utopian, but we all affectionately called it the TULIP. When the Covenant War started, it was decided that the TULIP would make a wonderful new type of drop-ship for the ODST's, because its shape was seen as perfect for a drop-ship. Its main bulk was a simple box-like structure that surrounded the large globular engine area; this area comprised the crew quarters, while the compartments for the guests and the gambling sprouted from the front of the ship, looking like two submarines. The gambling areas were what had caught the UNSC's attention and caused them to impound the ship and retrofit it for military use. The top several floors became ammunition storage areas for the guns that now bristled from the top of the ship, the middle levels were remade into sleeping

and dining quarters for the ODST's, and the lower floors were made into specialized drop-bays that held the Single Occupant Exoatmospheric Insertion Vehicles (SOEIV's)--the pods, as we called them.

As I entered the bridge I saw Captain Jayne Reynolds pacing before the front view screen. Jayne was a harsh yet fair captain. He was well-loved by those who served with him and they all knew that he would do anything for them to keep them safe. They also knew that he was one tough S.O.B who had been known to place recruits into lifepods—naked as the day they were born—and jettison them in the direction of the nearest colony world if they washed out. Due to this, most everyone simply referred to him as Wash now, though never to his face. I could tell right away that things were very wrong.

“Hey, Jayne. Why the early wake-up?” I asked as I approached the Captain.

“Michael, we have some major problems inbound. We know already why Levosia has gone silent: the Covenant is massed in this system. We have already sent word to ONI; they still want us to drop your men in the middle of this and have you find out if there are any still alive. They want to gather as much information as possible about Covenant forces, and to save as many people as possible, all for ‘Intelligence’. We need to know why they are here and what their plans are; you and your grunts are our way in. We’ll get you as close as possible and drop you into the main city. The plan is to extract you within the week. So pack your gear accordingly, Mike. Our prayers will be with you all.”

I didn't waste time with words, the view outside enough to convince me that every moment was precious right now. I saluted and started running to the launch bay where my squad would be gearing up. I couldn't help but grin as I heard “Crush” espousing the virtues of having an entire bandolier of grenades compared to most soldiers' normal “twin-baller special”.

“Hell, take two bandoliers, Crush...we may need 'em. Cap says we have a week down there, so I say pack for two just to be ready. Let's move it, men! We drop in 10 minutes!”

I continued to bring them up to speed on the intel I had been given as I suited up in my grey camo armor. I tended to carry dual magnums into battle, as well as the typical silenced SMG that most ODST's carried. Added to this already impressive arsenal were a sniper rifle and a trophy from a previous battle: a jackal's energy shield, powered down and clipped to my belt. I then bent to packing my pod with enough ammunition and grenades; enough to take down a small army, I hoped.

“Drop ETA is five minutes; Alpha Company to your pods!” I barked the order as I finished loading the supplies I thought I would need into my pod and watched as the men and women of my command hurried to obey the order.

As commanding officer, I was the last to board my pod after making sure everyone else was locked down tight for the drop. I gave our newest recruit's canopy a soft rap and spoke on a channel that only she would be able to hear me on. "You doing okay, Jacquelynn?"

She gave me a thumbs-up through the viewport of the pod and I could hear both excitement and a bit of fear in her voice as she answered me. "Just shiny, Commander."

I gave a nod and moved to my own pod, sealing myself in and turning off all of my helmet's comm units for a moment. I gave a soft sigh before saying a quick prayer. With a small movement of my jaw, the comm unit was turned back on. "Alpha Company, sound off!"

"Tighe, all boards showing green, Commander!" came Jacquelynn's swift reply. She was our resident hacker and was supposedly a good kid to have in a firefight, according to her training scores. I hoped she was better in a fight than our last computer expert; I was tired of losing good kids in this war.

"Crush, ready to frag some Covenant, sir!" I couldn't help but grin, because in some ways Wesley Jacobs was just a child still. No older than Tighe, he was a veteran Demolitions expert already. The man was a wiz when it came to blowing things up.

"Save it for the ground, soldier. Cridlin here, all green, sir!" Sara Cridlin was a fine soldier and my second-in-command. It seemed that nothing could ever faze this girl; she was as cool under fire as she was sitting in the mess hall playing cards with the rest of the guys. She was also our second Demolitions expert, so she and Crush had an unofficial competition to see who could make the biggest bang, with the least amount of explosives used, during a firefight.

"Riesch here, all green sir! Nav maps have been downloaded to all pods and double-checked for optimum landing site. All of it is looking good!" Donald Riesch was our Navigation expert. He was in charge of all the maps and of making sure we all got to where we needed to be.

"Coleman, all green, sir! Cap says he will be dropping some warthogs with us. I have their drop platforms already slaved to my pod's' navigation systems." Harry Coleman was our vehicle expert. If something could be driven or flown, you could be sure that Coleman would know how to do it or be able to figure it out within moments.

"Rowlett, ready to rock, sir!" Simon Rowlett was a tough-as-nails trooper who didn't take anything from anyone. His voice sounded a bit off over the comm, as though he had his helmet's visor open; I figured that he was most likely smoking his typical foul-smelling cigar and filling his pod with its smoke.

“Peepers, boards all show green, sir! Covenant forces have yet to take out any of the planet’s satellites and I have already hacked into their systems. Feeding you all telemetry data....now.” Max Hussainy was our eye-in-the-sky man. Intel was his game and he played it better than anyone else. That’s why he was stuck as a Drop Trooper: he was so good that he could keep the Intel coming from hundreds of different sources and still keep his head during a firefight, scoring as many kills as anyone else.

“Viking, ready to rumble, sir!” Tim Nordegren was code-named Viking for the fact that he looked like a stereotypical Norse Viking. He towered over the rest of us by at least a foot and a half, and had to have his combat suits specially made for him. He had long blond hair tucked under his helmet, and was the only one in our group known to have wrestled a Brute to the ground, breaking its neck in the process.

“Chug, all green, let’s drop, sir!” Rand McKenita was our heavy ordnance expert. I knew his pod would be loaded down with rocket launchers, RPG’s and all manner of really big guns. His code name was Chug for two reasons: the first being that he could drink anyone under the table, and the second that no matter how bad a situation got, he would just keep on chugging through it like the ‘little train that could’. This guy did not know the meaning of the word ‘quit’ and was a bit fuzzy on the definition of anything else unless it involved an RBG and something going ‘boom’. Normally, he was a man of few words and many Neanderthal-like grunts.

“Demon here,” came a growl over the comm, “and everything’s in order. Let’s go corpsify some aliens!” A laugh came over the channel from most of the other grunts as they heard Demon’s enthusiasm. Unlike Crush’s blustering nature, DTony LeHane was named Demon because that’s the way he fought. He was a small-weapons and hand-to-hand specialist, able to see a weapon in even the most mundane of materials. Rumor had it that he had taken down a grunt with no more than a rubber band and a paperclip, although the truth is that he had a small exploding capsule glued to the paperclip, causing it to explode upon contact with the grunt’s head, rather than just blinding it. Demon had a small belt full of pouches that had more little gizmos and odd pellets of things—even more than that old cartoon character Batman did, I think—but I was more than glad to have him on our side.

“Ghost here, all’s green.” As Demon was named for his way of fighting, so Ghost was named for the fact that he was an expert in camouflage and was an expert sniper, like I am. I can’t recall how many times an expertly-laid crossfire of sniper rounds from myself and Tegan Bedford had won us a very tight battle.

I signaled the all-clear to the drop sergeant who would be in charge of seeing us off on the mission, and his voice came back over the intercom to us all.

*“Good luck Alpha, drop will commence in 10.... 9.... 8.... 7.... 6.... 5.... 4.... 3... 2.... 1!”*

As the Sergeant hit “1”, the drop doors below all of the pods simply fell out from under us and the clamps holding the pods released; small thrusters activated on the top of the pods to push us from the ship and into the main atmosphere. My hands wrapped around the twin control sticks and directed the small spurts of thruster fire that would bring my pod onto the course that Riesch had fed into all of our nav comps. The hope was that at this distance, and with using only small spurts of thruster fire to keep us in line, the opposing military would mistake us for space junk, small rocks, or anything other than drop-pods containing people. As my team formed up behind me, the Captain’s voice came over our headsets.

*“Godspeed, Alpha Company. We are sending all info back to Oni on what’s going on here and as long as we are able to, we’ll be back within a week to get you out of there. If we can’t be here, then some other ship will. If you can rescue people, do so, but do not put yourselves in needless danger for any civilians. Reynolds out!”* Before his link fully cut out, we could hear him calling for the gunners to get firing solutions on the various Covenant crafts that were already inbound on their position.

For several long minutes we descended in silence, watching the fireworks of the TULIP taking on several small Covenant ships. The TULIP seemed to be giving a lot better than it was getting, but for the moment the Covenant forces were trying to come in from above the TULIP, which exposed them to all of the guns. I didn’t think it would be too long before they realized how sparsely-defended the bottom of the ship was, due to the drop-bays being located there. Sure enough, after several more minutes, I realized that the smaller ships were simply a decoy; a larger ship was moving in slowly, running dark for the most part, most likely in hopes the TULIP’s gunners wouldn’t see it.

“TULIP, this is Rhelin...you have a large Covenant gunship coming up under you, it’s running dark. Co-ordinates are approximately....”

Before I could give the co-ordinates of the ship, it had unleashed with all of its guns. Blinding spheres of plasma darted forth like miniature suns to slam into the TULIP’s underside. Several areas in the drop-bays started to spout gouts of flame and venting atmosphere. Within moments, charges were set off that would separate the drop-bay areas from the main ship compartments. I knew Wash would have waited for as many of the gun crews to make it back as possibly could before he did so, but with the speed it happened, I was guessing that most of those crews were dead from the first barrage. With the main weapons now gone, the TULIP turned slowly on its axis, and I was afraid it would not be able to make it out of the area intact. As the Covenant gun ship’s cannons started to glow once more, the thrusters of the TULIP blazed to life, and with front of the ship lacking extra weight, the now-lightened ship lurched forward swiftly, avoiding the next volley of plasma.

*“Rhelin...I’m sorry , but we won’t be the ones coming back to get you. Thanks for trying to warn us about that ship. May God be with you all!”* The Captain’s message came over a failing signal; most of the communications array was full of holes from plasma hits.

“Don’t worry about us, Jayne...just get yourselves to safety,” came my swift reply, even as I felt the forces of gravity begin to buffet the pod as we slipped into the outer reaches of the planet’s atmosphere.

The sphere at the end of the TULIP was more than just an odd decoration; it began to glow with traces of blue electrical fire as the FTL drives powered up and flung the TULIP into hyper-speed. We were now officially on our own, and our escape option was only half a ship. Hopefully Jayne would be able to get home and bring in a fleet to rescue both us and the world we were dropping onto before it was too late.

“Ummm... guys,” came Jackie’s voice over the unit commnet, “All of the purple below us is very pretty, but I think it may also mean that we’ve been spotted!”

I swiftly turned my attention to the screens; sure enough, there were several Banshees heading in our direction. The one-man fliers were waiting for us to get low enough before they attacked. I swiftly pulled up the files we had on these vehicles and saw that they would have enough fuel to stay with us until we came in range of their weapons. Pushing the sensors to the limit, I also caught sight of a Scarab moving in towards our landing zone, the giant walker looking like a very deadly spider from this height.

“Ok, guys, let’s play this one tight. Keep your chutes in until the last possible second, and we’ll see if we can’t use our speed to fall right past these guys and get on ground before they can either blast us out of the sky or get themselves ready to greet us down there.”

While I tried to sound upbeat for the guys, inside I was cursing up a storm, even inventing some inspired new curses on the fly. The sensors told me that no matter how fast we were going, when we hit the chutes to slow us down, the enemies were going to eat us alive out there. We stayed on course and kept speeding towards the ground below, the numbers ticking away as swiftly as did the time left until we would have to trigger our chutes or risk digging our own graves by plowing into the ground unimpeded.

“On my mark, trigger your pod’s chutes, try to jink and juke as much as your controls will let you as you descend...anything to make yourself a harder target to hit. Deploy chutes in 3.... 2.... 1... mark!”

As I said the last word, twelve sets of metal vanes shot from the tops of our pods to slow our fall considerably and, unfortunately, set us up for the specters to shoot at easier. Within

moments, balls of plasma shot through the sky at us, trying to take us down. Fortunately for us, most of them had been snap shots, trying to get us with a swarm of fire rather than by any accuracy. I knew, though, that they would take more time in firing the next barrage and that our luck may run out when they did. Several curses came over the comm unit as near-misses left carbon scoring on some of the pods' hulls. Then the next barrage came through and my fears were realized as Crush's voice came over the unit's com.

"Frak! Commander, they hit my chute! I'm going down fast! Looks like I'll be digging my own grave, guys, but I'll see if I have enough juice left in this thing to steer it so I can take that Scarab with me! See you guys on the other side!"

Before any of us could say anything, he had shut off his comm unit and his maneuvering thrusters kicked in on max. Dropping like a rock, he managed to aim his pod straight at the wraith whose head was swiveling upwards to get a bead on us and was intending to fill the air with even more plasma fire. Before the Scarab could get a targeting solution on us, Crush had plowed straight into the large gun that looked like a giant cyclopean eye. The resulting explosion, a mixture of the plasma conduits and most of Crush's armament going off upon impact, reduced the Scarab's head-like cannon to ash in seconds and set off secondary explosions throughout the Scarab's entire body, sending it crashing to the ground.

Sara's voice cut softly over the comm as though she were whispering. "You won, Crush. Drinks are on me when we meet in the next world." Her voice then came harder and louder as she once more became the unit's SIC, "Prepare for landing, we're still coming in a bit hot!"

"That's ok," Jackie's voice quipped. "I'm gonna be cooled off by the river I'm heading for!"

Sure enough, all of us came crashing down through the trees on the outskirts of the town we had been aiming for, except for poor Jackie, who went splashing down into the river. While the rest of us reached for the explosive bolts that would release us from the pods, Jackie triggered the emergency raft so that her pod came bobbing back up to the surface of the river and started to float slowly downstream. The door blew off of Chug's pod first and he came out, kicking open a hatch on the side. Reaching in, he pulled out a loaded rocket launcher and raised it towards the heavens, sighting in on the handful of Banshees that were swarming towards us. He grinned, and I knew he must have thought they were all traveling too close together. Bad news for them, but wonderful news for Chug. The rocket shot forth towards the cluster of Banshees, taking out the one in the lead of the formation. The explosion buffeted the others, and the wings from the first blew out to either side, slicing into the cockpits of its wingmen, sending them spinning off into two more. Only one had seen the destruction as it was coming and had pulled up in time, but it would not save him. Suddenly the Banshee's

cockpit screen splintered, a spiderweb of cracks radiating out from a single hole; an armor-piercing bullet had made its way through the ship and into the pilot's head. As the now-pilotless Banshee careened down to hit the ground behind us, Ghost lowered his sniper rifle and tilted his head each direction, cracking his neck a couple of times.

"Good to get out of that cramped pod," he said, ejecting the spent shell casing and sliding the next one home so he would have a shot already in the chamber. He slung the rifle over his shoulder and moved to help Sara and Demon, who had tossed a rope out to Jackie and were in the process of pulling her and her pod to shore before she could float off too far. Finally, we were all out of the pods and geared up for our long trek.

For two days, we kept moving as silently as we could through the town. It was difficult going, but stealth was one thing my group members were experts at, and so it was without much difficulty that we ascertained that there were no other humans here, or anywhere else on the planet. The Covenant had killed everyone and was now gathering their forces here. It was very obvious that our first mission of finding and hopefully rescuing survivors was a wash; all we could do now was to try to learn what it was the Covenant wanted with this planet.

It was on the third day that our squad's luck began to change for the worse. It started when Simon thought he saw a survivor running down the street. Simon gave chase, telling us over the comm that this stranger had on a long brown trench coat and sneakers. He reported that the stranger was running from a group of grunts. As we tried to converge on Simon's location, we could hear the sounds of gunfire and Simon calling again, saying that the stranger had ducked into an odd-looking blue box. We all heard a strange sound that seemed to rise and fall in pitch as we turned the corner to where Simon stood, staring in shock at an odd scene. Where the box should have been were instead two grunts that had somehow stuck each other with plasma grenades and were running back and forth in fear, knowing they were about to die. After the blue flash of the grenades vaporized them, one of the few remaining grunts noticed our group approaching, and his eyes locked onto Simon. The Unggoy growled low as he pulled two plasma grenades out and both flared to life. The grunt bathed in the blue glow from the grenades as he ran forward right at Simon. Seeing this, Demon swiftly pulled out his magnum and unloaded several rounds into the grunt's head. As the dead grunt dropped to the ground, the plasma grenades flew from lifeless fingers right towards Simon. Several more shots rang out; one grenade was hit by the fire, blowing up in mid-air and throwing Simon to the ground. The other grenade landed on his back and started to pulse swiftly, about to explode. If it had been a normal grenade, we would have rushed forward and tossed it somewhere else, but one of the problems with the Plasma Grenades favored by the grunts was that they stuck to almost everything they came into contact with. All we were able to do was dive behind cover as Simon

was engulfed in blue plasma fire. Rubble and smoking pieces of ODST armor rained down around us.

“I’m sorry Michael...I...I tried to stop it.”

“I know, Tony. You did your best, but there was nothing more that could have been done.”

“I hate to be the bearer of bad news guys, but I think we’re about to have some more company,” came Viking’s voice over the comm.

We all got back to our feet and took places in the shadows of walls and behind the larger debris in the street; bombed-out vehicles or pieces of building made good cover. We could hear some sort of large thing approaching, sounding like a dozen chainsaws cutting through a forest, bearing down upon us. SMG’s were readied as it loomed closer and closer. Finally, it rounded the corner and was upon us, and the spitting of bullets couldn’t even be heard over the racket the vehicle made. It looked like a motorbike bred with a wood mill; four large blades chewed up anything in the bike’s path. One of the largest Jiralhanae was at the wheel of the bike, which we called a “cutter”. It was aiming right towards the pile of debris where Viking had taken up his firing position. He stood, still streaming bullets at the cutter as the Brute steered right towards him. The cutter hit the debris and sailed a few feet into the sky; at the same moment, Viking tried to dive to the side, but it was too late and the cutter going too swiftly. We all seemed to cry out at once as we watched his body get pulled into the great saws that served as the cutter’s front wheels. His shredded body was left in a streak of red blood on the street as the cutter moved off swiftly and started to make a turn to come back at us again.

“Chug,” I growled into the comm, “take that bastard out!”

“Done.” The reply was immediate as Chug dropped his SMG to his feet and swung forth his rocket launcher once more. It took him only a practiced moment to load it with a rocket and swing it up to his shoulder to take aim. The rocket surged forth on a gout of flame to impact the cutter, sending it leaping into the air once more, though this time in several pieces.

“Let’s move, people, but keep your eyes peeled. These Brutes always travel in packs it, seems.” Sara’s voice over the comm got us all moving once again.

It is always hard losing a squad member, but to have two go in such a short time always tends to leave you feeling a bit hollow inside. We all knew we had to keep on the move or end up following Crush, Simon and Viking into the next life. As we made our way through the streets, I thought that perhaps Jackie was crying; she had her comm off so we could not hear

her, but with the way she moved, I was pretty sure she was sobbing. The poor kid had seen quite a lot in her first tour of duty; I only hoped that I could get her out of this hell alive. That particular prayer seemed a lot further from coming true as we rounded a corner and ran headlong into two Brutes in power armor, both of whom were wielding gravity hammers. Don was the first one to round the corner, and came upon the Brute as it was doing the same. ODST helmet clunked audibly with Brute armor, and Don looked up at the hulking alien before being flattened by a gravity hammer that crumpled both human and armor like a used soda can.

With a cry of rage, we all spread out and began to fire our SMG's at the two behemoths, the bullets pinging off of their armor and gouging holes in the nearby walls and ground. The Brutes spread out as well, even as Ghost and I made our ways back to find cover and bring our more powerful sniper rifles into play. We both found what seemed like good cover and called our shots. We aimed for the neck plates, where the need for movement made the armor weak; simultaneous bursts of gunfire sounded, blowing the armor of both Brutes to pieces as it overloaded trying to compensate for the damage the bullets would have created. It would take only a moment for the Brutes to see where we had fired from, and as it seemed that my cover was better than Ghost's, I was able to get off a second shot, taking my Brute between the eyes and dropping him to the pavement without a head. Tegan, though, was about to take his second shot, when the Brute did something totally insane. Giving a spin, he threw his gravity hammer at Ghost, like a contestant in the Olympics might have. It seemed that the hammer was made so that just one button push was needed to create the gravitational fields which made this such a devastating weapon, so that when it hit Tegan, it was traveling with the force of a freight train and slammed him back into the building behind him, crushing most of the bones in his chest. I swiftly switched on my VISR hud in my helmet to check on him, but instead of the green outline that would have marked him as a living friendly, I saw a simple yellow outline around his body, just like what outlined everything else that was debris in the street.

Without his powered armor, the SMG rounds swiftly brought the Brute to his knees. As it sagged there, I raised my hand, issuing a cease-fire order. Drawing my Magnum, I walked up behind the Brute and pressed the barrel against the back of his head, pushing up the Visor of my helmet so that the Brute would hear my words before he died.

"You just killed a brave man. I am sick and tired of you and yours doing this. I don't know what you're doing here, but I plan on stopping it, no matter what it takes. First, though, I am going to kill you, but not in glorious combat as you would like. No...I am going to put you down like the rabid dog you are." And with that, I pulled the trigger, sending the bullet into the back of his head. As his body fell forward, I motioned to Jackie.

"Scavenge their armor. See if you can hack into anything to see what they may have been up to."

Jackie didn't say anything, but set to work to see if she could get anything from their systems. Unfortunately, all she was able to get from the scraps was a map of the town that showed which buildings were being used by the covenant and which had been closed off. Upon comparing their map to our own, we decided upon a location to camp through the night and made it there without further incident. We were pleasantly surprised when we made it to the abandoned warehouse; it seemed that before the Covenant had gotten there, the folks of Levosia had been stockpiling UNSC weaponry. After comparing the maps with what we had seen firsthand, we found that the warehouse was much smaller on the inside than the out, and figured the Covenant had not looked all that closely at it. We decided to give it more of a look, and after several minutes of searching, Jackie found a control panel that was basic enough for her to hack into. A whole wall slid into the floor to reveal a hidden chamber filled with weaponry, explosives, and even some vehicles. We decided to bed down in that chamber once we found a way to open and close it from the inside. Once inside, we closed the wall-like door and settled in for some much needed sleep.

The next day, I went out alone while the rest of the unit rested and itemized what we had found in the warehouse. With the armament we now had, I decided that it was time to deliver some payback to the Covenant. For my lost troops and for all the others that had fallen by their hands...nothing would really be enough, but something would be better than nothing. Before the day was done, I had found and marked the site of their communications center, their vehicle depot, and what appeared to be a command center. I snuck into the command center and found myself a safe little perch to settle in, where I could easily listen in and not be seen by any of the aliens below. I couldn't help but grin at my timing as the holo-transmitter in the middle of the room buzzed into life shortly after I had settled into my spot. One of the prophets that ruled the Covenant appeared on the platform and demanded an update on progress, the vast distance being covered by the transmission and the low quality of the receiver conspiring together to make his voice sound metallic. A Brute stepped forward to give the report.

"We had a minor incursion, your holiness, but things are well in hand. The ship was driven off, and while we have suffered some small losses in the field, we have killed at least half of the team that managed to land upon this planet."

"Small losses?!" roared the prophet's holo-image. "According to all reports so far, to kill these five humans you have lost a Scarab, several Banshees, a handful of Unggoy and no fewer than three Jiralhanae--not to mention the several frigates that need extensive repairs before they are battle-ready again! These are mere humans! We are the superior beings! Exterminate them!"

"Exterminate this, you windbag. I'll show you what a mere human can do."

Though it was probably a stupid move, I slid into position to put a bullet through the head of the Brute that had been speaking to the prophet. Before the Brute had fully fallen to the ground, another bullet found the holo-projector, and then a third the head of the communications tech running the equipment. By that time, a jackal had reached the alarm button, and sirens began wailing through the onetime-theater. I heard the projectionist's booth I had just been in blow to pieces as the jackal and grunt guards took the more direct route in trying to kill the person who had shot their leader. Luckily for me, after the third shot, I was on my feet and on the move without a second's hesitation. The sniper who stayed still for more than a couple of shots was the sniper who invariably died when his position was found. I found myself dropping into the sewer outside the back door while the grunts tore through debris trying to find my body. Calling up our maps of the city and its sewer systems on my VISR HUD, I began to navigate my way back to the old warehouse. It was time to plan a strike!

The next day we set out in two groups. Jackie and I went to raid the communications building, to see if we could get a message out to the UNSC. The rest of the unit was assigned to make as much trouble as they could at the Vehicle Depot, with the best-case scenario being the destruction of the facility. As Jackie and I made our way stealthily into the comm building, we started to hear that perhaps the other raid had not been the best of ideas. It seemed the Covenant had expected the vehicle depot to be hit, and had put out their forces to prevent just such an eventuality.

"Rhelin, Cridlin here, we have a problem. The place is swarming with Covenant, please advise."

"Michael." Jackie had hacked into the communications grid. "I've gotten into their servers; this planet is just a stepping stone to invading Earth."

I nodded softly to Jackie and gave a soft sigh before switching my comm unit to Sara's frequency. "Alpha, listen up! We have intel now that this is just a step towards the Covenant attacking Earth. This means you are to do as much damage as possible to that vehicle depot. Whatever resources we can deny them may tip the balance in the long run."

"Understood, Cridlin out!" Sara sounded tense, and honestly I couldn't blame her. I was basically sending her to die.

As Jackie prepared the system for our outgoing message, I switched my HUD so that I could view the battle from an orbiting UNSC satellite, in hopes of being able to help my unit in some way. I watched as the two Warthogs moved in fast to cover Sara, who was sneaking in from the side to plant whatever demolitions she could. The first test of my soldiers came from a pair of Mgalekgolo. The Hunters were the first line of defense, and they did their job well. The first one in line fired a green bolt of plasma that sheered through Peeper's helmet.

Coleman wasn't far behind, as a Kig-Yar jackal sniper found him to be a great target. They had both been driving their respective vehicles, so both came to screeching halts without a driver. That left just Chug and Demon in the Warthogs' turrets. They knew they would not be able to stay in the stalled vehicles for long, but they were going to be sure to make the best use of those machine guns before they had to leave them. Concentrated fire from the two turrets made swift work of the Hunters and a slew of grunts that had been gathering for the attack. One grunt cowering behind the body of a downed hunter somehow managed to escape unscathed and, shaking like a leaf, leapt from cover and started firing its needler at Chug. Dozens of pink crystals embedded themselves in the man's chest and side, but he ignored them all, keeping up a steady stream of fire until finally those slivers of crystal exploded into a pink mist, ripping his body apart. Demon let loose another barrage of fire as a swarm of Yanme'e drones descended from atop the building. Seeing them, he leapt from the Warthog and began to run, but it was too late. Several charged blasts from plasma pistols slammed into the vehicle, causing it to explode and sending Demon flying through the air. Sara was exiting the building when a Brute saw her and tossed a spike grenade at her. Narrowly missing her, the grenade exploded behind her, the spikes it released slamming into her back as she ran, driving her forward and pinning her to a nearby wall. Before the Covenant could finish her, however, she pressed a button on her belt remote, detonating the building.

Shutting off the vid-feed, I closed my eyes for a moment until Jackie's hand fell on my shoulder and she told me the uplink was ready. Taking a deep breath to steady myself, I opened the comline and sent the UNSC what very well may be my last message.

"This is Michael Rhelin of ODST Alpha Command. Levosia is under Covenant rule. They are using the planet as a staging ground for an attack we believe will be heading for Earth. Only two of us are left, and we will do our best to do as much damage as possible here. Send as much of a fleet as you can; our homeworld may depend on it."

Our job now was simply to survive for as long as we could, and when we finally went down, to take as many Covenant forces with us as possible!