

VERTICAL UMBRA GE

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A HALO WAYPOINT CHRONICLE

HISTORIAN'S NOTE

Operation: VERTICAL UMBRAGE takes place alongside the Halo 4: Spartan Ops mission "Everything Has Gone Wrong," during the UNSC's campaign to drive Jul 'Mdama's Covenant faction off Requiem.

**Requiem (Shield World 0001)
Epoloch system
February 14, 2558 (UNSC Military Calendar)**

"You got eyes-on, Shadow Two?"

Spartan Horatio Fry's tone made it obvious that his question was more rhetorical than practical. He'd spent enough time with this group to know that Spartan Nina Kovan *always* had "eyes on." Kovan was a no-nonsense, walking death sentence with an aim as true as her word. And as Fireteam Shadow's designated marksman, she did indeed have eyes on everything.

"Affirmative. Is Stone in range of the summit site?" Kovan adjusted the advanced optics suite integrated into her GUNGNIR-class Mjolnir armor to key in on the nearby Covenant firebase that had been established just two days earlier. "Looks like they haven't gotten their ball to roll just yet."

“It’s ‘got the ball rolling,’ Nina.” Spartan Bonita Stone couldn’t help but crack a smile at Kovan’s butchering of yet another antiquated colloquialism. “But that’s good news regardless. Might just be able to stop their little airshow before it even starts.”

The Covenant summit site was designed specifically to mass produce fighter craft at a rapid pace—shutting that process down would deal a significant blow to the alien alliance’s ability to gain air superiority in the local sector. For the better part of the week, Fireteam Shadow had been just one of several Spartan fireteams deployed from the UNSC flagship *Infinity* to battle a zealous Covenant remnant faction for control of an artificial world called Requiem.

“Agreed.” Fry interjected. “Shadow Four, how’re your baby birds looking?”

“Props are hot and charges primed. Just waiting on your signal.” Shadow Four was Spartan Jason Kidman, whose voice would have sounded raspy even without being fed through the comms mic of his OPERATOR helmet. Moments later, his second-generation Mjolnir kit was fully synced with the small flock of TQ-8 seeker drones, each outfitted with a lightweight but high-yield explosive charge.

With the pieces nearly in place, Fireteam Shadow’s operation was ready to begin. After Stone cleared the inner perimeter patrols with help from her active camo module, Kidman’s drones would drop the doors, allowing Stone and Fry to infiltrate and hit the Covenant firebase at its heart.

Prepared to engage, Fry made one last check with Kovan. “Shadow Two, you’re on overwatch. Keep your new toy primed in case we were wrong about that production run.” Fry paused. “Or in case you need to finish the job. There should be enough firepower there in the event we hit trouble.”

“That won’t be necessary, Shadow One.” Kovan responded. “If you find trouble, I’ll hit it for you.”

“Duly noted.” For a split second, the lower contours of Fry’s GOBLIN-class Mjolnir helmet mimicked the smile that had formed on his own face. Partly in amusement from Kovan’s retort, and partly in anticipation of any opportunity to add another blemish to the Covenant’s once-stellar combat record.

Before he could give the final go-ahead, however, a different voice broke through the team’s comms.

“Fireteam Shadow, this is Spartan Miller in Ops. I’m filling in for Commander Palmer, so apologies to your team’s handler, uh, Spartan Carmichael, for going over his head here.”

Fry cursed to himself before opening a channel. “This is Shadow Leader. Go ahead, Miller.”

“Got a job for you. Infiltrate a Covenant cruiser and destroy her power core. I’m sending you coordinates now.”

Whatever reservations Fry might have had on hand were not made remotely apparent. Spartans knew that they fought for priorities often greater than their purview, and that moments lost to protest might ultimately equate to lives lost to the enemy.

“We can help you out there. Give us a few to get over to those grid squares.” Fry switched to team comms. “Stand down, Shadow. Change of plans.”

“Define change.” Stone was immediately curious.

“We’re being diverted. Priority op on a nearby Covenant cruiser.”

Kidman’s focus turned to a more glaring logistics hurdle. “*Cruiser?* That’s going to be an interesting ingress without our limo.”

“Limo” was the team’s term of endearment for the D79 Pelican dropship that had provided the bulk of their transportation between *Infinity* and each subsequent mission across the surface of Requiem. The nature of their mission at the summit necessitated a more delayed and distant LZ to keep the Pelican out of harm’s way when the fireworks started. They were too close to the firebase now to be picked up and no longer had the time to get far enough away. And Fry knew it.

“Calling an audible, we may just need to grab a rental.”

Panom's Canticle
Requiem
In position above "Refuge" site

Ryn 'Alun mentally reprimanded himself for the loss of control. Slight though it had been, the absent-minded rubbing of his wrist while on the bridge was an act that might betray his nervous anticipation to his crew. It was unbecoming of a shipmaster to display such feelings, however subtle the motion might be to suggest it. He must always be in control. As an ancient Sangheili proverb taught:

one who has not mastered the self

who has not emerged victorious

from the battle within their own mind

has no hope of mastering the foes without

And the foes from without had come to claim the home of the gods—a home which was now shared with the worthy. Requiem had become a symbol of everything their revitalized alliance had achieved. They hadn't just risen above the Covenant of old, they were becoming what it was always meant to be. High Charity seemed a pale imitation compared to the seat of the gods themselves, and this was just the beginning.

The Silent Blade, 'Alun's own special operations unit of deadly enforcers, had been deployed to Requiem's Refuge site, where they would no doubt make short work of the humans that were clumsily fumbling with its arcane machinery. Word had come that they had already engaged an increasingly notorious demon squad called *Nalsaban*—“Crimson” in the human tongue.

It had been well over three years since Jul 'Mdama led his combined fleet

to the shield world, where he sought to awaken one of the gods and ask for their aid in the war against the humans. It was only six months ago that they had finally been granted access to its wonders within.

This, as ‘Mdama had declared, was actually due to the arrival of a *human* vessel, an event which had seemed to interest the warrior-god that had slumbered within this world—the Didact. The humans’ arrival—heralded by the Demon himself—represented a perfect opportunity to test the might and worthiness of the Covenant against their enemy’s greatest hero. And the prospect of pleasing one of their gods in the flesh was one that inflamed the spirit of zeal within their hearts.

But the Didact was now absent, having bequeathed Requiem to the Covenant, and over the last six months they had begun the process of turning this hollow sphere of heaven into their new home.

The Refuge was a location they had discovered early in their efforts to penetrate the shield world. There they had been, in the warrior-keep chamber, where the lone human awakened the Didact. The Forerunner delivered his judgment, declared the return of the gods, and upon his departure transported the worthy warriors who had fought to the core of his world to this sanctum.

“You are Sangheili,” the Didact had said. *“Loyal and strong, even in your second form. You will serve well.”*

It was here that ‘Mdama was formally named the Hand of the Didact, and it was here that *Panom’s Canticle* had primarily been stationed to protect.

After the demons had successfully reconnoitered this site on two occasions, this third incursion was ordered to be the last—a weighty responsibility, and one that Ryn recognized as the source of his anticipation. Ever was he wondering whether his loyalty and strength had served the gods well.

“Shipmaster,” a bridge officer turned to him. “One of our Phantoms approaches.”

“Our deployed forces are not meant to return until after the humans have been repelled and the Refuge reclaimed,” Ryn replied. “Hail them.”

“They give no response, Shipmas-- they are picking up speed!”

“Raise the hangar shields!” Ryn ordered.

A slight rumble from within the cruiser told them it was too late.

Ryn ignited his energy sword and motioned for two guards to follow him, knowing precisely what area of the ship the demons would target.

Their true test of worthiness had come at last. The Silent Blade would serve the gods well today.

Panom's Canticle
Requiem
Positioned above Site Req//7848-2328

Turned out, getting *in* was the easy part. The Phantom dropship that Fireteam Shadow had commandeered had given them as smooth an entry point as they could have hoped for, but their exploits did little to improve any diplomatic relations.

“Shadow Four, you got that guided tour ready to go?” Spartan Fry had barely finished the question when the digital ship layout Kidman was readying began to overlay key waypoints and nav markers onto their helmet displays. It would make finding their way through the *Canticle* relatively straightforward, but it wouldn't stem the mounting Covenant resistance pouring into each iridescent indigo passageway.

The Spartan fireteam moved as a fluid unit through the ship's interior, each member alternating and coordinating enemy engagements with practiced precision. Stone checked her VISR readout to confirm their location. “Primary reactor chamber isn't far now. After this next set of doors we've got one hallway left.”

Kidman finished transferring several rounds from his MA5D into the skulls of three Kig-Yar, their needler fire no longer impeding Shadow's progress. “I'm picking up chatter on native frequencies—localization script is having trouble keeping up with it all but I can tell you that they aren't exactly happy we're here.”

“You needed a translation for that?” Kovan's reply landed somewhere between dry wit and incredulity.

Fry brushed aside the sibling-esque squad banter to focus on the task at hand. “Shadow Leader to Spartan Miller.” Fry waited a split second for his

helmet's comms display to confirm signal receipt. "Sorry for the delay, sir. We're meeting heavy resistance in the cruiser. Seems like they *don't* want their spaceship blown up."

It only took a moment to get a response. "*Understood, Shadow Leader. Keep me informed.*"

"Shadow Three, update on that final corridor?"

Stone tilted her head to the side as she responded. "The good news is that I do have an update. The bad news is that it's not good news."

"Kidman can translate that if you need." Kovan interjected.

Before Fry could offer a leader's rebuke, Stone continued. "We've got enemy targets entering the far side of the corridor, it's not going to be easy."

"Distance?" Fry asked.

"Approximately forty meters." Stone responded.

"Acknowledged. We enter on my mark. I'll take point—Nina... call Abbey."

Kovan smiled—not at Fry's use of her own name, but that of her personal sniper rifle. "She's already on the line."

The Spartan fireteam entered the corridor and covered the first several meters in what seemed like an instant, but long enough to confirm Stone's recon assessment as several Covenant soldiers opened fire at the other end. The tip of the spear, Fry immediately activated a Z-90 PCE, emitting a glowing and imposing hardlight shield in front of the group to stave off the enemy's opening salvo.

“Shadow Two, be ready on the drop.”

Kovan was already looking down Abbey’s sights, eager to answer the call. “Knock-knock.”

In what seemed like one singular moment, Fry’s hardlight shield deactivated and four shots rang out, dropping three Kig-Yar and two Unggoy, Kovan using the tighter quarters to her advantage.

Fry barked out the next phase. “Stone, go quiet, take the solution, and get ahead of us—we need to get to that core.”

The “solution” was a sizable munitions case that contained the device originally meant to be used by Kovan at the summit site. Despite the unexpected change in objective, Fry hoped that it might still prove valuable. He also wasn’t about to leave it behind in enemy hands regardless of the location. Stone grabbed the case, activated her active camo module, and disappeared from sight.

After dispatching the remaining resistance, Fry, Kovan, and Kidman emerged from the corridor into the larger chamber that housed the main reactor.

Unfortunately, it also housed at least a dozen veteran Elite warriors, including one particularly imposing Sangheili sporting a more ornate command harness. A ping on Shadows’ helmet displays highlighted the commander and identified him as Ryn ‘Alun—shipmaster of *Panom’s Canticle* and leader of a Covenant spec-ops group named the Silent Blade.

Igniting his energy sword, Ryn ‘Alun crossed the room with rousing battle cry that sent his lieutenants into a frenzy of their own. Plasma and hot lead filled the air a moment later as the two forces clashed.

Set against a pair of them, it was with a keen awareness that Fry noted

that the saurian soldiers moved with a speed and skill that largely matched those of his own Spartans. And while he dispatched the first of his foes in short order, the second proved to be more up to the task. Energy shields shimmered and sizzled as they traded blows.

The dance couldn't have lasted more than a few intense moments; gritting against the bruising strength of the Elite, Fry used his bulk to advantage to set the creature toppling over. But the encounter was enough to narrow his focus, to take his mind temporarily off the larger conflict.

It would cost him.

The shipmaster was given a moment he did not waste, a well-timed lunge knocking the fireteam leader off balance and onto the cold floor. When Fry tried to return to his feet, 'Alun was back over him in an instant, delivering a series of devastating blows to the helmet and torso that put the Spartan back on the ground.

Vision swimming, Shadow One fought hard against the nauseating darkness that tugged at the edges of his vision, choosing instead to keep his gaze fixed on the shipmaster's sneer of contempt.

Fry's failing localization suite tried to make sense of the voice behind the mandibles.

“[Demon... payment... death...]”

The shipmaster's sword flared to life with his final word and in a single seamless gesture began its descent, the blade primed to pierce armor and augmented heart alike.

Even with his enhanced reflexes, Fry recognized there was no time to change its course.

He braced for the inevitable.

The blow never landed, at least, not where he expected.

An invisible force sent the shipmaster stumbling away.

Stone's active camo flickered off as she countered the shipmaster's attack, dropping two primed M9 frag grenades between them to turn Ryn's offensive lunge into an evading dodge.

"Fry, we have to move *now!*" Stone barked as she scrambled to get their fireteam leader back on his feet, using the ensuing explosions as cover.

"Where's our solution?" Fry's query was strained in the way only broken ribs will incite.

"With Nina."

Kovan's location pinged on each Spartan's VISR as she opened the case to reveal an M6/E Grindell/Galilean Nonlinear Rifle. "Shadow, meet Selene. I think I'm going to like her." Her almost unsettling glee was tangible even over comms as she finalized the integration protocols to sync her targeting optics with the modified Spartan Laser and primed the first shot. "Don't tell Abbey."

The chamber flashed as the first blast from Kovan's new toy hit the reactor, accompanied by a howl of despair from the shipmaster before delivering a final command to the surviving Elites that needed no translation.

"Abandon ship."

The reactor core's hum turned into a higher-pitched whine as Kovan fired another blast and the few remaining Covenant forces scrambled towards their escape pods. "Going somewhere?" Stone remarked as she dropped

two of the fleeing Elites, leaving only the shipmaster—but as he rounded a corner, it was clear that they'd lost him.

After three more successive salvos from Kovan, Kidman confirmed the objective's completion. "Reactor is in runaway overload—now would be a *very* good time to leave."

Fry initiated a comms link back to *Infinity* as the fireteam regrouped and looked for an exit strategy. "Miller, this is Shadow Leader. Cruiser power core is hit and overload in progress! We're evac'ing now. Expect a light show within thirty."

"Hot damn, good work, Shadow Leader!"

The rest of Spartan Miller's response was interrupted by Kidman. "Shadow One, I've got a local lock on a drop bay with empty squad pods—if we hurry, I think we can make it."

"Those are good enough odds for me, Shadow Four. Nice work."

Requiem
Jungle region outside “Refuge” site

Ryn ‘Alun’s hearts sank as he watched *Panom’s Canticle* shudder and break. The clouds parted as a shockwave rippled outwards, coolant spilled to the ground from its underbelly like blue-green ichor, and a final groaning eruption of purple fire uprooted the vessel’s position, sending it on a collision course with the far-reaching jungles of Requiem.

You are Sangheili, the Didact’s words echoed in his head. *Loyal and strong.*

He *had* been loyal—to his brothers, to the Covenant, to the gods... it hadn’t been enough.

They had come here with numbers and might and faith that hadn’t been witnessed in years, and still it took only a handful of these demons to undo it all before their eyes.

You will serve well.

Perhaps this is what the old warrior had meant. To be “tested” as a warrior and not simply be rewarded with victory. True service and sacrifice came through continuing to endure even in defeat—to draw strength not simply from within, but from the spirits of one’s fallen brothers, becoming a vessel of vengeance; demanding blood be spilled for the blood that was lost. And *much* blood had just been lost.

There was no doubt in his mind that this was the same fire the demons had themselves been tempered by when their own worlds were burned. It was the same crucible the Covenant had endured after being split asunder, only to be reforged into something new.

In that moment, Ryn felt he understood what their god had meant. Loyalty

and strength were indeed a virtuous foundation, but a warrior must build upon them with *purpose*. As *Panom's Canticle* collided with the ground, smoke and fire billowing upwards like a pillar of holy fire, his own became clear.

He would be reforged in this defeat into something new, and he would hunt these Spartans—these “Shadows”—to whatever end it would take him to avenge the fallen.

The Silent Blade disappeared into the jungle of Requiem, knowing that his time of retribution had only just begun.

As *Panom's Canticle* broke apart in the Requiem sky, a *Gloto'kef*-pattern assault carapace sped away from the wreckage towards the surface, carrying four Spartan-IV super-soldiers. The vehicle's inertia dampeners kicked in for a surprisingly elegant landing, its four pod doors retracted, and Fireteam Shadow stepped out into a forest clearing.

Miller's voice urgently crackled over the comm. “*Shadow Leader! Was your team clear? Shadow Leader!*”

“We're here, *Infinity*,” Fry confirmed, calm and collected as ever. “And all in one piece.”

“*Excellent work, Spartans*,” Miller relaxed. *Infinity's* AI Roland then chimed in, informing him of another situation at Forward Base Magma that Fireteam Crimson was to be redirected to.

Fry stepped up to his team. “Autopilot retrieval is active,” he marked their position for the Pelican, a small green arrow on their HUD map started moving towards them. “Limo's on the way.”

“You hear that, Selene?” Kovan removed her helmet and patted the munitions case. “We’ll have a warm meal for you back home in no time.”

“I wouldn’t make any promises quite yet,” Fry warned. “Just got a new order, apparently Carmichael was feeling left out of all the fun.”

Stone let out an audible sigh. “Something tells me we aren’t going to make that Valentine’s dance at the atrium park tonight, are we?”

“Maybe next year.” Kovan smirked. “Don’t tell Abbey.”