



ANVIL ACCORD



A HALO WAYPOINT CHRONICLE

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HISTORIAN'S NOTE

Halo: Anvil Accord *predominantly takes place on March 3, 2560, on the seventh anniversary of the formally declared end to the Human-Covenant War.*

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PRIVATE COMMUNIQUE
JULY 2, 2553
CLASSIFIED TOP-SECRET

>> 07960-48392-TH // FADM HOOD, TERRENCE
<< ARBITER 'VADAM, THEL

RE: ANVIL INITIATIVE

Arbiter,

Apologies for the method of communication for this message. I did not wish to suggest hosting a summit to discuss the matter, as initiating such diplomatic proceedings would inevitably attract bureaucratic concessions that I would prefer to make later rather than sooner.

Not long ago, I told you that I couldn't forgive your kind for the atrocities committed against mine. I still struggle with it, but our recent deployment to Sanghelios with

Infinity opened my eyes to the reality that things are far more complicated than they seem.

I'm sure that *Infinity's* involvement in neutralizing the hostilities on your doorstep has only complicated things further for you as well. We both find ourselves having to take unconventional actions in unprecedented times. With that comes an opportunity to lay a foundation of hope for the future.

After our last conversation, it's become clear that we both have emerging generations for whom the Covenant War will eventually be a distant memory. Difficult as it is to imagine, there will come a time when our peoples will not carry the burdens and prejudices of the many who suffered over the last twenty-eight years... I believe they will hope to be part of something greater. Even as certain elements aim to ensure this alliance does not grow beyond a momentary accord of convenience, I have to believe that the children of our children will one day see the best in each other.

But that work must begin today, soon as it may seem.

During the war, Anvil Station served as a repair and resupply outpost, but fell into disuse a few years ago. The question of what to do with this station has fallen under my purview, which brings me to the crux of my inquiry.

I propose we use this facility to establish a joint multispecies task force. Officially, Project: CRUCIBLE will serve as a retrofit job to test skunkworks prototypes as our technologies become more integrated, leveraging the finest artisan-armorers, technical experts, and warriors who fit the desired profile. Our broader goal will be fostering cooperation and common cause.

Should you agree, we can make preparations and begin screening for the right personnel.

Until we meet again...

Terrence Hood
Fleet Admiral

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**MARCH 3, 2560 // 0900 HOURS
ANVIL STATION // ARMOR BAY G-11**

Dr. Luther Mann and Chief Warrant Officer Dariya Voronkov scrutinized the assembled set of armor before them. Voronkov wheeled her chair closer and pulled out a pair of thick-rimmed glasses to study it in close detail.

The ASSAILER powered armor had turned up during an operation conducted by the Office of Naval Intelligence a short while back. It bore a striking resemblance to several Sangheili combat harnesses. Anvil Station's personnel and resources had been deemed the perfect fit to study, analyze, and test the unique features and capabilities of this new mystery.

They had provided the ASSAILER's components to several Spartans who were looking to conduct their own stress tests. Mann had already observed half-a-dozen of them wandering over to various war games simulation decks.

"Greetings," came a voice from behind them, and both turned to see an approaching Sangheili. He halted a few feet away from them and raised a fist to his chest.

"You must be Khar 'Tvorm, our new artisan-armorer." Dr. Mann spoke in well-practiced Sangheili. "A pleasure to meet you."

Khar 'Tvorm was clad in a unique harness specialized for Sangheili craftsmen, its curved plating fitted with an assortment of hidden tools and

sensors. The Sangheili nodded politely to Dr. Mann. If he was surprised at all to hear a human speaking his language without a translator, he did not show it. Joining the pair, the Sangheili began conducting his own visual assessment of the armor.

“Recovered during an operation on Sqala,” Mann said. “Naval Intelligence were investigating some waylaid prototypes and the operative they sent discovered that they were being put to use by Venezian janissaries and independent contractors.”

“What do we know of these groups?” ‘Tvorm asked.

“Unfortunately, not an awful lot right now,” Voronkov replied. “A new problem, to be sure. The galaxy seems to be in a constant state of providing those.”

“No sense fretting about that today,” Dr. Mann smiled. “It’s a day of celebration, remember?”

‘Tvorm tilted his head slightly—a motion that Dr. Mann had come to understand was a Sangheili’s expression of confusion.

“Seven years to the day since the Covenant War’s end,” he clarified. “You didn’t know?”

This day marked the formal end to a war that had spanned almost three decades and saw billions of people killed and countless colonies razed, including Mann’s own homeworld.

In the end, it had been an unlikely alliance between humans and the Sangheili loyal to the Arbiter—now under the banner of the Swords of Sanghelios—that had severed the head of the Covenant, shattering the empire into disparate remnant factions.

“I was not present for the War of Annihilation,” ‘Tvorn clarified. “My people were fortunate to escape the reach of the Covenant during its founding age. It is only recently that we have found our way back, where we discovered that the Covenant as our ancestors had known it had already fallen.”

“Fascinating!” Mann’s eyes lit up. “You mean to say... your people developed as an entirely separate society and culture over thousands of years?”

Dr. Luther Mann had served as a scientific attaché for several joint missions between the UNSC and the Swords of Sanghelios, and was seen as something of an expert in the field of xenanthropology. But an “expert” in this context meant very little when stacked against the long and expansive history of an alien civilization that was spacefaring at a time when humanity was at the height of classical antiquity.

“I am certain that is why the Arbiter has decreed that many of us who wish to serve are being sent to Anvil Keep. I believe he wishes for us to remain at a distance from the galaxy’s current political landscape.”

“Why do you think that is?” Dr. Mann turned his back to the armor, his attention now keenly locked onto a very different matter of study.

“I suggest you clear your schedule for the next lunar cycle or two, artisan-armorers,” Voronkov remarked with a grin. “You will receive no end of questions from this one.”

“My people escaped the Covenant at a time when it was composed only of Sangheili and San’Shyuum,” ‘Tvorn obliged Dr. Mann’s curiosity. “We have never encountered those that were forced into their species-based hierarchy over the ages that followed.”

Dr. Mann could see the value in that. It was highly unlikely that ‘Tvorn’s people held the prejudices that had become ingrained towards other species under the Covenant. That the Arbiter sought to *preserve* that

perspective only served to bolster Mann's respect towards the Sangheili leader—though, of course, that could only be sustained for so long.

He recognized that humanity bore that burden of judgment towards other species as well. For millennia, humans had looked up to the stars and wondered if they were alone in the universe... and the answer to that question had arrived with a war that almost wiped out their entire civilization. That put something of a sour note on the revelation that humanity was part of a far larger galaxy than they had ever thought possible.

“There are people out there who would hate you simply for being Sangheili.” Voronkov gave voice to Mann's thought, though he could not fathom hating an entire species of billions. “Not everyone's as much of a dreamer as Dr. Mann here.” She paused for a moment, as if wondering whether she should have given voice to that, but quickly resolved that it was something her associate needed to be reminded of at times—that today wasn't necessarily an occasion to celebrate for *everyone* out there. How Dr. Mann had reacted to the loss of his homeworld wasn't quite as universal as he sometimes took for granted.

“Is that how you feel, given your injury?” ‘Tvorn asked, gesturing as he spoke.

“Oh, I didn't lose my legs to the Covenant.” Leaning back in her seat, Voronkov shook her head at the rising memory, “I lost them to an enemy bombing run while fighting other humans some twenty years back.”

“And did you hate them?”

“I did, for a long time. For years,” Voronkov mused. “‘Innies,’ we called ‘em. ‘All the same,’ we said about ‘em. Hatred is a hard thing to let go of...”

She could still vividly recall her last moments in combat as if they were playing out in front of her eyes all over again.

Rebel forces had claimed one of the major shipyards on Hellas, a smash-'n'-grab operation that had taken advantage of the fact that the only personnel around at the time were a few dozen combat engineers of the UNSC Army.

They hadn't stood a chance once the enemy had claimed an AC-220 gunship and a handful of Hornets, launching an array of missiles at anybody stationed near the firebase's turrets.

Wasn't even supposed to be there...

"I found my peace eventually," Voronkov murmured, pulling herself out of the memory. But even as she said the words they came with a sour taste. "Rebuilt my life as best as I could. Reality is, humans will go on hating each other as we always have, and they'll go on hating aliens as they've learned to. The pain we cause each other can't just be taken away, it's part of what makes us who we are—even if it isn't pretty."

Voronkov glanced at Dr. Mann who looked as if he was in the process of trying to balance some kind of equation. "So, some hate because they can't let go of the past, some hate because of ignorance, because they've been told to for so long, and some hate simply because they can... How does the galaxy move forward?"

The end of the Covenant War may have allowed humanity a chance to catch its breath now that it was no longer under the looming shadow of annihilation, but it certainly hadn't *ended* conflict. Merely... changed it. There were more factors in play now, more complications, more "sides." Hatred certainly wasn't the sole factor motivating these groups, but it was a powerful one.

Dr. Mann knew that there were still bloody years to come. But there was hope as well. Between it all, those who were willing to look and move forward had been brought together.

He was glad that he had ultimately chosen an assignment here at Anvil Station rather than returning to the Ark. He had once thought to honor a friend he had lost—fellow scientist Dr. Henry Lamb—by disappearing from the galaxy entirely to join the research teams on the Forerunners’ extragalactic foundry. But he had responsibilities now—people to live for. Through this, he realized he could honor Henry by choosing to live in the galaxy he had helped to save.

“Which leads us back to the task at hand,” ‘Tborn returned their focus to the experimental armor. “To which group do you think those who built this armor belong? Who do *they* hate—and why?”

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**MARCH 3, 2560 // 1300 HOURS
ANVIL KEEP // HANGAR BAY**

Yshi ‘Nbara loved to fly.

Ever since she had been a hatchling, she had been told stories about the sky-chevaliers of old—legendary pilots and pioneers who rode through the skies of Sanghelios on the backs of the leather-winged predators known as ‘sKelln.

As ‘Nbara approached her *Elsedda*-pattern strike fighter, a vacuum-sealed Banshee variant that served as a powerful interceptor in space combat, the biomimetic influence of those majestic creatures that defined aspects of the vehicle’s form filled her with a sense of connection to her peoples’ far-reaching past.

‘Nbara was uncertain of how the rest of her fellow pilots within Harmony Wing felt as they too strode up to their fighters. She had only served with the others in their squadron for a few weeks and was still getting acquainted with them, both on an individual basis and their dynamic as a

team. But each pilot of the wing was a volunteer, united in purpose—that in itself held the makings of kinship.

“Need a hand getting into your Banshee, elder?” Spartan Natalie Kenzo spoke in a jovial tone over their internal closed channel. ‘Nbara had heard the Spartan and fellow Pilot Officer Syed Khan refer to wing leader Vran ‘Mkoth as “the elder” on several occasions despite him being older by only a handful of annual cycles. Clearly there was much about human humor she had yet to grasp.

“The only hand I recall being offered was my own to you after our last sparring round, Spartan Kenzo,” ‘Mkoth replied.

“Sometimes I worry that you two are going to bicker so much that you’ll crash into each other before we even leave the hangar.” Pilot Officer Khan spoke as he slid into the cockpit of his Banshee.

“In which event, saving the galaxy will be up to you and ‘Nbara,” said Kenzo. *“Which I’m sure you could do, but with way less style without us.”*

Khan chuckled. *“Way less something, that’s for sure.”*

The Banshee cockpit opened and ‘Nbara slid herself in, settling comfortably into the ergonomic interior. The craft’s holographic viewscreen synchronized to her helmet’s heads-up display and quickly linked to ‘Mkoth, Kenzo, and Khan. She placed her hands over the spherical control grips that caused the craft to hum to life—its impulse drive powering up.

“Comms check,” Vran ‘Mkoth spoke over their internal TEAMCOM channel as additional pre-flight checks were conducted, his tone now focused. ‘Nbara noted that he had recently taken to using the common human shorthand.

“*Harmony Two online,*” replied Spartan Kenzo.

“*Harmony Three good to go,*” Pilot Officer Khan confirmed.

“Harmony Four,” Ranger ‘Nbara concluded the callout. “Ready to fly.”

She felt the rising swell of anticipation in her hearts as their pre-flight checks cleared and Anvil Control confirmed their departure. She reminded herself that this was just a routine patrol run, nothing more than a box-ticking exercise in the grand scheme of things, but *this* was where she felt most alive. She was one with the movements of her fighter—in time, with her fellow pilots as well.

‘Mkoth winked a green status light across their synchronized HUDs and their Banshees darted forwards, the fighters’ wails turning to silence as they penetrated the hangar bay’s shield and were let upon the vast dark ocean of stars beyond.

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**MARCH 3, 2560 // 2100 HOURS
ANVIL STATION // FACILITY COMMISSARY 3**

“Okay, what about this one: how many fingers does a Sangheili have?”

“Twelve. Eight on our hands and four on our face.”

“Aw, what the hell—did Jacobs tell you that one already?” Spartan Adrian Vesco pushed his third pint of *hiskal* across the table to join the other now-empty glasses. His expression one of disappointment.

“You overestimate your ability to communicate humor,” replied the Sangheili warrior sitting across the table. “Your wit is as weak as your weapon.”

“Is that why you can’t beat my score on the carbine drills?”

Ovi ‘Taar grunted in amusement at the Spartan’s retort and the still-lingering disgruntled expression on the human’s face. “Ah, thank you for reminding me, I have not yet started the carbine drills this cycle.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Vesco pressed his hands to his face in a groan. “Just make sure you put the right finger on the trigger.”

“I will be sure to try each one—just for you.”

The music playing in the background grew louder as the track changed to a bass-heavy electronic dirge. *Shots Fired* was the name given to Commissary 3 on the leisure level of Anvil Station. It had become a favorite stop for training pairs coming off collaborative combat endurance drills—each pair typically being made up of one Spartan and one Sangheili, though there was a fair mix of non-augmented personnel sprinkled throughout the cohort to diversify the experience and expand any available data gathered.

Each day, scores of hand-selected warriors from both the UNSC and the Swords of Sanghelios engaged in a variety of drills, simulations, and multi-modal tactics courses—all finely crafted to increase the cooperative output of the multi-species effort. But despite all the rigorous training and strategic cross-examination, it could legitimately be argued that a post-sim evening in *Shots Fired* could do more to effectively progress cross-cultural diplomacy than a week of live-fire drills. Vesco and ‘Tarr had been regulars for a while now, but the ribbing never seemed to grow old.

Vesco finished hailing down a server for another round and then turned back towards ‘Taar. “Alright, fist-face. Your turn.”

The Elite warrior pondered for a moment and then spoke. “How many humans does it take to operate a spacecraft?”

“Nobody knows, because the AI do everything anyway,” Vesco finished the well-worn joke. “C’mon, that’s an old one. Gimme something good.”

“Very well,” replied ‘Taar. “Have you heard the one about the glassed planet?”

“No.”

“Neither have they.”

“Oh, damn... That *is* good.”

“I heard it from Jacobs.”

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**MARCH 3, 2560 // 2300 HOURS
ANVIL KEEP // STATIONMASTER’S STUDY**

“You’re worried.” Spartan Commander Vinay Sahil said matter-of-factly.

He had worked with Stationmaster Toda ’Murajai for over half-a-decade and could read the Sangheili now as well as any human—it was the stationmaster’s visible shift into stoic stillness that gave his concern away.

“There is a fine line between worry and caution,” ‘Murajai stood at the center of his study observing a stacked series of holographs projected from a round table, each laden with assignment and deployment details, strategic planning analyses, and hastily scribed conference notes.

Just two hours ago, they had received a distress call that necessitated a change in plans and the entire station was scrambling to coordinate a response. Tomorrow, they would begin the process of mobilizing their forces to answer the call.

To illustrate his point, ‘Murajai resumed the audio feed for station-wide communications as Sahil set his helmet down on the holotable.

“You got those slipspace travel calcs ready yet?”

“Negative, we’re still takin’ inventory of how much we’re even able to send to Nysa.”

“Almost makes me wish they’d installed a real AI on this station. Y’know, they’d probably have run the numbers before I even finished asking the question...”

“If Anvil Keep did possess such an intelligence, you would not be here to ask any questions.”

“Point taken.”

“We’ve just received special dispensation to dock three of our fully loaded Condors aboard Sword of Conjunction along with Amity, Harmony, and Sympathy wings. Sounds like our ride to the fight just got an upgrade!”

“Oh, I’m buyin’ whoever made that arrangement happen a year’s supply of hiskal! Rerunning travel calcs to Nysa based on A’uzr-pattern stats, I’ll have an update for you shortly.”

The cacophony of chatter continued across a dozen different channels with scarcely a second for input.

“This is what they’ve been training for,” Sahil said reassuringly. “Listen to them. They’re ready.”

Years had been invested into building bridges and bonds between the human and alien personnel of Anvil. Every decision had been made to

demonstrate the power of collaboration, maximizing their impact as a team and turning them into a well-oiled machine.

‘Murajai focused on a display showing a selection of units that had been chosen for long-range deployment. His attention settled on a list of paired names for Riftborn special operatives—Babych and ‘Toizari, Prentis and ‘Ookol, Vesco and ‘Taar... Sahil understood the stationmaster held the same desire as any leader—to have the time for one more round of training, one more systems check, one more opportunity that could make all the difference in the battle to come.

But a leader also needed to adapt when that wasn’t possible, when they had to let go and allow their warriors to put their training into action.

“We have prepared them to the best of our ability,” ‘Murajai spoke, as much to himself as to Sahil. “I only wish that we had more actionable knowledge on what they are being sent into.”

“Whatever the galaxy throws their way, they’ll have each others’ backs. Have faith in them.”

The axis of power in the galaxy had seen a series of turbulent upheavals in recent years, a far cry from the more clear-cut conflicts of the past. Ancient Forerunner constructs had been reactivated across the galaxy, followed by an uprising of artificial intelligences, and now the Banished and countless other factions were filling the power vacuum left in the wake of Cortana’s short-lived reign.

“*Faith*,” ‘Murajai repeated the word with a grimace. The word aroused an instinctive reservation in the pit of his stomach. “I knew faith when it filled the infinite expanse of empty promises and false journeys into divinity by those who manipulated my people for countless ages.”

“Faith,” Sahil reiterated steadily, confidently. “In our brothers and sisters—their training, their sense of duty. In everything we have built and accomplished here.”

‘Murajai had to remind himself at times that humans used the word very differently. It was what their kind had learned when they faced the overwhelming might of the Covenant: how to hold onto the smallest and most distant hope in the face of annihilation. In some ways, this accord between their species reflected the true realization of the Covenant—an alliance brought together not by coercion and conquest, but cooperation.

Their people would not fight for abstract notions of holy ascension, but for each other. On the battlefield, these bonds could make the difference between victory and defeat.

‘Murajai clicked his mandibles once and powered down the holotable, finally conceding to Sahil’s counsel.

“Get some rest, Stationmaster,” Sahil said with a tone that was both kind and firm. “That’s an order.”

Amusement filled Murajai’s voice, “I do not believe that you have the authority to give me orders, Spartan Commander.”

“It’s a flat team structure.” Sahil smiled back. He gestured to a group of four stone tablets lining the left-side wall, each of them etched with the saga of ‘Murajai’s clan. “You know, you’ve still yet to tell me the full story of these.”

“When this mission is over, perhaps I shall.” ‘Murajai looked to an empty space next to the fourth tablet as Sahil picked up his helmet and made to exit the study. “And perhaps we shall forge the next chapter together...”