

SATURN DEVOURING
HIS SON

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A HALO WAYPOINT CHRONICLE

HISTORIAN'S NOTE

Saturn Devouring His Son takes place in the year 2556, a year following the events of Operation: FAR STORM in Halo: Hunters in the Dark which saw the UNSC Home Fleet suffer significant casualties from 000 Tragic Solitude's assault on Earth.

Elvie didn't seem like much to most. The sprawling habitat network spanned nearly thirty percent of the available surface of LV-31—an oblong planetoid locked in orbit amidst the asteroid belt of a non-descript gas giant in the Marcey system. Elvie got its name from the planetoid's own shorthand, but got its funding from IMC. In fact, it was essentially a massive satellite corporate campus for the Imbrium Machine Complex, an influential industrial firm that had entered into a partnership with the BXR Mining Corporation to establish a robust survey and mining operation aimed at harvesting vital natural resources from the surrounding asteroid field.

In the wake of the Covenant War and the events that followed, the United Nations Space Command had placed great importance on partnerships such as these as they sought to rebuild the fleets they had lost.

Julien Donney had come to IMC after a brief stint in the military. Like many, he had been pressed into service near the end of the Covenant War, but after his initial four-year deployment he felt drawn back into the

civilian sector. Sure, serving with Big Green was fine when it was easier to find the “greater good,” but once the Covenant wasn’t the same planet-burning bogeyman, Julien was far more interested in finding a bit more autonomy in his own life. It didn’t take much convincing to sign a Survey & Securities contract with IMC—his familiarity with both industrial labor and military procedure making him an ideal fit for a variety of potentially hazardous assignments.

Elvie had quickly become “home” for Julien, despite the remoteness of the location. He liked the people, he liked the routine—just enough danger, just enough challenge, and more than enough pay. Especially after responding to this latest appointment: enhanced security detail for a particularly high-value find on one of the nearby asteroids.

“So, what’s the prime haul BXR is so jumpy about?” Julien finished fastening the final coil links and transfer seals on his OSTEO suit before reaching for his helmet to boot up the internal comms pack.

“S’posed to be big. Alien big.” The answer came from Abe, a seasoned veteran of IMC’s hazmat corps and Julien’s active field partner.

“Apparently three days ago their deep sweep on Site 22 pinged back a massive Grade-K deposit.”

That got Julien’s attention. “Covenant?”

Abe’s head tilted back the way it always did when he was prepping one of his patented one-ups. “Older.” He paused for effect. “The *really* good stuff.”

Julien took a deep breath and gave himself an extra moment to do some math. The “good stuff” could only mean one thing: refined Forerunner alloy—a potentially massive boon to the entire operation, including anyone who might help in securing it . . . but his mind immediately shifted from credit windfalls back to the task at hand as their group leader entered the room.

“You two sealed up yet?” Mox had been with IMC for well over a decade and wasn’t one for dawdling about before an excursion.

“The haul’s confirmed?” Julien was eager, but still a bit incredulous, knowing Abe had a tendency to jump the assumption gun when it came to big digs.

“Oh, it’s confirmed alright.” Mox tapped the status pad on the nearby wall-mounted console and prepped for egress. “Apparently when the one-twenties they dropped finally blasted through the boundary layer, they found a lot more than they bargained for.”

“What do you mean?”

“It wasn’t just some inert cache. *It was a whole damn ship.* Or that’s the best guess for the moment at least.”

Julien suddenly understood why IMC was deploying several hazmat squads to the site directly. If there was an actual ancient alien vessel entombed in the asteroid for who-knows-how-long, there could be dormant tech that might suddenly be not-so-sleepy when they started chipping away the surrounding space rock and knocking on old doors.

The crew made final checks on equipment and prepared to board the IMC-branded Pelican dropship that would take them from Elvie to Site 22.

*

Silence.

Cold. Empty. Hunger.

Dark. Barrier. Hunger.

Time. Silence. Hunger.

Trapped.

*

The Pelican gave a routine shudder as it made its final descent. It still wasn't exactly Julien's favorite part of the process, but he'd gotten more than used to it by now. Besides, as long as he had Errant Vee's latest album blasting on his personal audio channel, a little dropship shimmy wasn't going to dampen his mood.

After this payday, he said to himself, I'm absolutely catching the next spaceliner to finally see them play live.

There were still twenty or so seconds left on the song when the channel was overridden by Mox.

"Hey rockstar, tray-tables up. Get your gear."

Abe snorted and looked Julien's way. "That the new Vee?"

"On repeat, boyo." Julien checked his MK50 Sidekick pistol and refastened the tac-tool hatchet onto his chest plate. A few moments later, all-clears were given and the Pelican's rear troop bay doors lowered. As each member made their way out, they were greeted by a glittering starfield that made up the bulk of their vista, punctuated by the gas giant's bright blue hue and the gray-brown surface of the asteroid itself.

Site 22.

Dotting the immediate landscape were the EM-120 augers that BXR had installed to penetrate the outer rock layers. The one-twenties were often a miner's best friend—strong enough to break up large segments of rocky crust, but precise enough to make delicate headway into more precarious or potentially volatile pockets of dense material. The augers farther out from their landing zone seemed to be continuing unfettered in their progress, but any placements within a half-kilometer had been fully shut down.

Julien and Abe followed Mox the short distance to where a group of BXR miners and engineers gathered near the mouth of a small cave. Some of the miners were attending to routine maintenance on their cutters, while others seemed to keep their eyes on the IMC hazmat corps with eager anticipation.

After exchanging pleasantries and confirming identification clearance and order authorization forms with the BXR foreman, Mox wasted no time in getting down to business.

“Do we have any idea how this thing ended up rock-wrapped?”

“You kidding?” the foreman grunted. “Never seen anything like it. You’d think God himself painted this silver fish with a damn asteroid brush. And honestly, I don’t even care how it got here, I’m just thinking about how we get it out.”

The foreman glanced towards the opening, and Julien knew the look in his eye well when he turned back.

“This, my friends, is a retirement-grade find.”

“And you’re sure it’s a ship?” Julien asked.

“Orbital survey drones did a dozen different scans, and all turned up the same basic data. Maybe it’s a ship, maybe it’s an interstellar vacation home. Might not be sure of what it is, but I sure as hell know what it’s *worth*.”

As the conversation continued to align on protocols and procedures, Julien’s attention wandered to the mouth of the cave. It wasn’t a natural formation, of course, but a circular opening several meters in diameter that had been bored in a striating pattern by the nearby augers. Julien was eager to get closer and found himself suddenly and unexpectedly overwhelmed with a unique flavor of curiosity.

His mental wanderings were cut short by the sound of Abe's voice. "So, what's the plan, Mox?"

Julien looked back to see his boss heading over, flanked by the rest of the IMC hazmat crew.

"BXR is going to reestablish a perimeter and recalibrate their equipment to see if they're able to open this can." Mox glanced down at their taepad and began to assign squad positions. "Lance and West, position one. Beck and Arti, position two. Louisa and Oswald, position three. Abe, you and Julien are in position four. Keep eyes and comms open, we start knocking in five."

*

Sound.

Light. Sound. Hunger. Movement.

Closer. Closer.

Armored casket. Hunger. Sound. Light. Freedom.

Food.

Weave. Circuit. Command. Open.

Food!

*

Julien was thankful for the dynamic tint on the visor of his helmet, because the pinpoint glare was becoming uncomfortable to look at for very long. It had been nearly an hour since the BXR contingent had begun their curated salvo of alternating beams from auger emplacements and handheld cutters, but it seemed like the only thing they had successfully displaced thus far was Julien's patience.

The foreman gave the signal to hold fire, allowing their equipment to recharge and cool down while they reassessed the situation.

Mox came over the IMC comm channel soon after. “Positions two and four, make sure your heat seals are good to go and see how close you can get to the target’s surface, I want a closer look and better data on this thing.”

Beck confirmed the directive, and the four operators began to head into the cave mouth. The target was only a dozen or so meters in, so the residual heat from the mining beams was still plenty prevalent. As they got within a few meters, they each started observational scans to log all possible datapoints.

Julien wasn’t sure if it was the intense heat shimmer playing tricks on his eyes, but after a few minutes he was sure he saw something strange happening on the target’s alloy surface.

It was almost like it . . . *rippled*—a bit like liquid, but maybe even more like some sort of metallic skin.

“Abe, are you seeing this?” Julien’s partner was uncharacteristically silent. “Abe?”

Julien turned back and realized he didn’t need verbal confirmation. Abe’s eyes were wide and fixed exactly on that same spot.

“What in the actual—”

Abe’s professional assessment was cut short by Arti’s own confirmation over comms. “I’m picking it up too, seven distinct points in the alloy, wait, nine. Mox, you should probably come and see this.”

Mox joined them just in time to see the silvery surface of the ancient construct peel away along a fresh seam, as the top layer was pulled back like armored curtains. The new opening revealed the enigmatic interior of a Forerunner vessel—of what class or purpose, no one present knew, but they were all immediately enamored.

After moments that could have been mistaken for months, Mox radioed in. “Positions one and three, on me for initial clearance sweep. Let’s see what we’re dealing with.”

Julien suddenly felt a pit of uncertainty in his stomach. “Mox, you sure? Should we wait?”

“For who? You want to give your old military buddies a call and hand this over to them? Or do you want to earn that payday you keep talking about.” Mox looked directly at Julien. “This is what we do. Who we are.”

*

UNSC SATURN

The last of the Black Paintings by Earth artist Francisco Goya watched over the ready room of the *Paris*-class UNSC *Saturn* from within a protective container, bearing the image of the Roman god Saturn gripping the bloodied, partially consumed corpse of one of his children. In the ancient myth, Saturn was haunted by a prophecy that he would be cast down by one of his sons—just as he had done to his own father—and so he ate them upon birth.

Ghostly white fingers clasped the sides of the tiny body as if he possessed talons rather than human hands, kneeling in what seemed to be a dark cave. His mouth was fully agape, and his eyes appeared frenzied, bulging with shock—as if surprised to be caught in the middle of such a grotesque act.

“I always thought he swallowed them whole,” Lieutenant Shafiq mused.

Captain Alvarez did not turn from the painting as he replied. “You’re quite right, of course, that is what the myth tells us . . . but Goya saw the horror of the act in quite a different way. In his interpretation, they were devoured, bit by bit. Of course, we are looking at it *far* removed from its original

context, regarding the political upheaval in Goya's time. The French Revolution, the Peninsular War, the Inquisition—all fascinating areas of Earth's history that, in some ways, resemble our own recent--”

A sudden alert interrupted the captain's well-rehearsed speech for new officers. Art was an easy icebreaker, after all, and listening to their responses gave Alvarez some insight into how they thought. On-the-spot interpretations could reveal much about an individual's tactical acumen and way of thinking.

“It seems we shall have to pick this up later, Lieutenant,” Alvarez said, straightening his uniform as he led Shafiq to the bridge. To his credit, he immediately assumed his station and began analyzing tactical displays.

The avatar of the *Saturn's* shipboard artificial intelligence was waiting for them at the central holotable, along with a visual layout of the asteroid surface. Lycaon bore the image of a man in a white-gold toga, but his head was that of a wolf.

“Garbled distress messages from Site 22, Captain,” Lycaon reported. “Contact with the onsite team has been lost.”

*

Cavern. Cold. Wet.

Dragging. Food. Screams. Hunger.

Feast.

*

SITE 22

Julien wasn't sure he knew what reality was anymore, but he knew it had a soundtrack.

Screams. Vacillating, ever-present, skin-peeling screams. Whether they continued to come from mouth or mind he couldn't be sure—and couldn't care.

He tried to recollect what had happened, to anchor his thoughts.

Not long after Mox and the initial group had gone inside the ship, their reports turned unintelligible, chopped, terrified. Beck and Arti had barely stepped foot beyond the craft's threshold to investigate before they saw Mox sprinting towards them.

But it wasn't Mox.

Not anymore.

And they weren't the only one.

Chaos had immediately engulfed Site 22, the miners and civilian contractors trying to fight an unknowable enemy with construction tools. Julien tried his best to hold them off, his military training—albeit brief—had kept him alive in the vital opening moments of the conflict.

The longer it went on however, the more he questioned whether or not he even *wanted* to survive such a thing.

*

UNSC SATURN

“What the hell is going on down there?” Alvarez muttered. “Can you clean up the distress message?”

“Attempting to now, sir.”

What played then was largely garbled static, mixed with irregular sounds of what seemed like small arms fire and multiple voices shouting at once. After thirty-six seconds, the audio fell to silence, though the static remained—like ocean waves washing over sand.

Alvarez turned to the central holotable and had Lycaon bring up Site 22’s security camera feeds. They cycled through empty vistas of the asteroid’s surface before Lycaon locked onto camera sixteen.

The camera covered the view of a rocky maw, a circular opening evidently created by a mining auger, it was the closest they had to the cavern where some kind of discovery had been made. Lycaon had requested further information over two hours ago, but the IMC crew had remained tight-lipped as they sought to “verify” their find.

“I don’t see anything,” Alvarez said.

Lycaon zoomed the camera’s view onto an irregular, shadowy shape. A dark trail smudged the ground behind it, and there appeared to be another figure wriggling and flailing like a fish pulled onto land from the sea. The resolution took several moments to improve as Lycaon locked and looped the footage, as by the time it cleared both figures had disappeared from the live feed. But there was no mistaking what remained in the shot.

There was a collective inhale among the bridge crew as their displays

received the image. Though few had encountered these monsters, all had heard the stories that had passed through the Navy over the last few years.

All had some familiarity with the name of these nightmarish creatures, like the dark sailor myths of old.

The miners of Site 22 had become a meal and a vessel for a timeless creature, a monster that knew how to wait, and how to win.

The Flood.

“Rules of engagement are clear in the event of an incursion such as this, sir,” Lycaon said. “Emergency Contact Protocol Upsilon must be implemented to withdraw all groundside units and limit the spread of the parasite.”

“*Withdraw?*” Alvarez repeated the guidance, dismissing it immediately. “The only personnel on the ground are essentially unarmed miners. Our troop complement is more than capable of making short work of this infestation. Prep Fireteam Leviathan for deployment.”

Lycaon growled. “Need I remind you, sir, that if even one of the Spartans is compromised by the Flood, use of MAC rounds and fusion warheads is authorized to sterilize the area.”

“And if we do that, we lose a massive deposit of resources that our fleets need to rebuild. We’ve barely managed to get the Home Fleet back up to a few dozen ships while the Brass is demanding whole battle groups be assembled, never mind the loss of materiel we’ve got on the ground and the site’s proximity to LV-31.” He squared his shoulders. “I say again, and for the last time, prepare to deploy—”

“I am sorry, sir,” Lycaon interrupted. “But in the event of a Flood outbreak, protocol supersedes your command, per UNSC Regulation 14-372-01. If you are unwilling to comply, I am authorized to remove you from—”

Alvarez's eyes widened, and what he said next came to his mouth almost as instinct. "Override codephrase, *actiones secundum fidei*."

Lycaon went silent. His holographic avatar remained active, and he stood as if calmly awaiting the answer to a question he had asked.

Alvarez glanced around at the bridge crew, who were all looking at him from their stations with a mix of expressions on their faces. He stood straighter to project his voice to the crew. "Bring all stations to alert. I want a Hazop group deployed to support Leviathan. Make ready to form a defensive perimeter and hold the line."

A lingering moment of tension hung in the air as none of the bridge crew immediately moved.

"Aye, sir," Lieutenant Shafiq spoke, turning his chair back to his station, and the others followed.

Alvarez rested his chin on his thumb as he sank into his command chair. His thoughts stayed with the image of the Flood form dragging its helpless victim into the cave. He felt the eyes of Saturn on his back, regarding him with those wide, opalescent eyes, caught in his act of barbarism.

They were devoured, bit by bit.

*

SITE 22

Julien was pretty sure he hadn't been infected yet, but he felt like his memories were becoming scrambled just the same as he watched UNSC forces descend on Site 22 like they were dropping in behind Covenant lines.

He made out a squadron of Cyclops exoskeletons and several Hellbringer units as they began to torch the area indiscriminately—every bit as likely to incinerate other survivors to deny the enemy any potential hosts from beyond the perimeter.

The magnitude of the initial find had necessitated a larger-than-normal contingent of staff assigned to Site 22. It meant there had been ample opportunity for the parasite to satiate its appetite and rapidly increase its own numbers in the time it had taken for the UNSC to deploy.

Not that it had been long... but it seemed almost too late now.

Julien grimaced. His sidearm's ammunition had run dry, forcing him to resort to a nearby laser cutter.

Glancing around he felt the cold grip of dismay.

He didn't know what he'd use after the cutter's charge was gone, and there weren't many other viable options.

That's when he saw them.

Myths. Legends.

Spartans.

The UNSC had seen fit to send a fireteam of four chemically and cybernetically augmented super-soldiers—heroes that had helped ensure the end of the Covenant War. Heroes that their greatest enemies had feared.

At that moment, Julien was struck by the dire enormity of the situation at Site 22. There was no way that Spartans would be sent into any scenario where normal, everyday people were remotely expected to survive.

The battle raged on, with Julien's heat seals constantly spiking to their maximum levels from the constant barrage of flame and firepower being brought to bear by the Hellbringers and Cyclops units.

For a fleeting moment, he thought they might actually have a chance. That this nightmare was something he could possibly wake up from.

Then the first Spartan fell.

Overrun by the parasite, one of the UNSC's living weapons suddenly found itself undergoing a new augmentation—twisted into a champion of dormant darkness. The Spartan's Mjolnir armor attempted to enact its countermeasures, pressurizing the hydrostatic gel layer to render itself immobile, and then detonating microexplosives within the helmet which shattered the Spartan's visor as it immolated the head within . . . *and it still wasn't enough.*

Julien wanted to run. To cry. To hide. But he couldn't move. Couldn't tear himself away from the sight of a Spartan turning on its own kind.

Couldn't stop watching in horror as it tore apart those it had once protected.

And then it turned towards him, and Julien knew his big payday would never come.

*

*Tearing. Scratching. Kicking. Burrowing. Breaking. Slicing.
Chest cavity. Spine. Nest. Devour.
oh-god-get-it-off-me-get-it-off-me
Become. Become.
Become!*

*

UNSC SATURN

Captain Alvarez stared at the grisly scene that was playing out before him on the holotable and across numerous tactical displays.

Horror. Denial. He was rigid with them both.

How could this have happened? A small-scale infestation of largely unarmed miners had cascaded into an outbreak that now threatened to overwhelm them. Once the Flood had consumed everything they needed on the ground, their insatiable hunger would direct them to this ship where they would be unleashed upon the stars.

If that happened, it was game over—not just for humanity, but all life.

And it would be his fault. The name of Captain Pedro Alvarez would live in unheard history as the man who unleashed a deluge of plague ships upon the galaxy. If any portrait of him were to be made in the future, it would depict him in Saturn's place . . .

For so long, they had thought of Spartans as symbols of hope that could turn the tide against any enemy they faced, no matter how impossible the odds. But he had never imagined how that could be twisted against them in the event the Flood managed to infect these heroes of humanity.

No choice remained. Lycaon had been right. Concerns about rebuilding the UNSC fleet now paled in comparison to the situation that was playing out on the surface of Site 22.

“This is Captain Alvarez of the UNSC *Saturn*,” he spoke on an open comm channel, and the nervous, sweating bridge crew turned to face him. “I am declaring CORRUPTER and UPSILON protocols. All remaining

groundside personnel have seven minutes to withdraw from Site 22 as the *Saturn* moves into position . . . where we will fire our arsenal of Shiva-class nuclear missiles.”

Alvarez avoided looking at Lycaon, who had remained inactive since the captain had uttered the codeword to neutralize the AI’s attempt to usurp his command.

“Good luck, and godspeed.”

*

SITE 22

Julien saw the world in a new way.

But not Julien.

Something . . . different. *More*.

His mind fought to be free, to understand. But it also embraced the longing for something else.

Unity.

A gift he sought to bestow on others. He searched and scoured the surface of the asteroid, sifting through bone and body at a rapid pace, looking for someone to share his new mind with.

Ah! There’s one!

Abe . . .

Devour.
Deluge.
Unity.
Peace.
We hunger. We find. We envelop.
Searching. Seeking.
More.

As he began to open his friend's mind, the horizon began to glow.

*

UNSC SATURN

Captain Alvarez gazed at what had previously been known as Site 22. The view from the bridge was still engulfed in fire. Only a handful of dropships had managed to return while the others . . . well, perhaps the detonation of the Shivas had been a mercy compared to what they had likely been reshaped into.

He wanted nothing more than to return to his quarters and get to work on the bottle of Titan Smoke he had been saving for retirement. But this would not be the celebratory drink he had envisioned, and it was a bitter realization that the twilight years of his career had culminated in his most brazen failure. He had already begun mentally rehearsing the court martial that no doubt awaited him.

Lycaon had remained inert and unresponsive. While Alvarez had known how to countermand the AI's attempt to usurp his authority, it had simply placed him into a kind of stasis. There was no doubt, however, that the techs back home knew how to restore his functionality.

A thousand desperate options ran through his mind—whether he could

initiate Final Dispensation and order the crew to run with him across the stars, or face the trial that awaited him and bear the burden of what his actions had cost.

“XO,” Alvarez called. “You have the bridge; I’ll be in my quarters.”

“Aye, sir.”

He would open that bottle after all, and perhaps come to a final decision at the bottom of a very large glass.

*

Arm. Weapon. Sharp. Cut. Hunger. Become. MORE.
make-it-stop-please-make-it-stop
Memories. Training. Hunger.
Weapon. Fire. Kneecap. Fall. Devour.
help-me-so-sorry-please-tearing-me-apart
Others. Fleeing. Leaving.
Horizon. Fire. Death.
A ship. Condor.
Approach. Swarm. Hunger.
won't-let-you-won't-let-you-WON'T-LET-YOU
Charging. Sprinting. Slicing. Food. Leave behind. CONDOR.
WONT-
Aboard.
LET-
Devour. Depart.
YOU-
Become.