



AGE OF RETRIBUTION



A HALO WAYPOINT CHRONICLE

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HISTORIAN'S NOTE

Halo: Age of Retribution *takes place on November 3, 2552, following the Master Chief's assassination of the Prophet of Regret on Delta Halo.*

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OVERLOOKING THE CHAMBER OF CONSECRATION DELTA HALO NOVEMBER 3, 2552

“The High Prophet of Regret is dead.”

It was perhaps the sixth time that I had heard the words murmured by Onsu ‘Valonro in as many units, but they carried the same air of reverence, sadness, and disbelief as when the honor guard had first delivered the news.

Word had spread throughout the ranks of the Covenant of the unthinkable. Not only was the Demon here, but he had assassinated the Prophet of Regret himself. Worse still, the order had come from the Prophet of Truth that, in an effort to eliminate the Demon, *Solemn Penance* must unleash its cleansing blaze upon Regret’s temple. Such desecration of a holy site was tantamount to an act of heresy, but too much had happened in too short a time to react and respond with dignified diligence.

The indignity was compounded by the accusation that this was *our* fault; the Sangheili had been collectively blamed for being unable to protect Regret. A radical change was reverberating through the Covenant, as the mantle of honor guard was taken from our people and passed to the Jiralhanae. These brutes were still newcomers to the Covenant, yet many said that they had been shown immense favor of late, which had now secured them a position previously enshrined in *our* sacred history.

Fourteen of us—myself, the councilor, the honor guard, and eleven others of lower-chosen rank—had gathered in the vicinity of the sacred ring’s chamber of consecration, where High Councilor ‘Yajadai bade that we take a moment of restitution amidst the chaotic winds of change.

By ‘Yajadai’s command, I was to keep an eye on the honor guard while he was still seized by grief. It was not a duty that I was enthused by, but as a mere lower-chosen in such esteemed company I had little room to complain or disagree. I contented myself with the hope that my service would be looked upon favorably.

“Remember the holy words,” ‘Yajadai had said to us. “Take the Psalm of Sorrow into your hearts.”

*Those who went before are gone
Those who left us wisdom
They have found a better place
And there their light shines on
This wretched life is our prison
As dark and cold as endless space
But their blessed light beckons
And so too does departed grace*

The words, spoken together in quiet prayer, buoyed our grief along to quieter shores. We sat for a while in a verdant clearing that looked out at the chamber of consecration, a great spherical cloister held within

the unmistakable angular struts and buttresses that defined much of the Forerunners' architecture. It sat above a large body of water that stretched off towards the horizon where shafts of golden light pierced through gathering grey clouds.

Around us were towering formations of rock covered in lichen and moss. A winding path ahead ascended towards a Forerunner door embedded into the rock, and the path behind curved around to a stretch of cliff overlooking the full majesty of this divine machine—this god-engine that we were blessed to tread upon.

It was Onsu 'Valonro's voice that broke the contemplative silence at last. The honor guard called out: "We who walk the Path honor you, High Prophet. Luminous beacon of the faithful, we remember your words, your wisdom, and your courage. May your name be spoken with reverence by the holy lords in the heavens, and echo in the spaces below—through the Hall of Eternity."

At this development, High Councilor 'Yajadai gave a slight nod to me, an indication that I had done well in my task. Though I felt as if I had done nothing.

"What will happen now?" I asked. It may have been considered inappropriate for one of low rank to speak openly in such a moment as this, but the councilor paid no mind to my insolence.

"There must be a vote to appoint a new hierarch," 'Yajadai said plainly. "The Great Journey cannot begin with an incomplete triumvirate. It remains to be seen whether my fellow councilors and I shall be recalled to High Charity, or if the appointment shall be made here on the sacred ring."

"And it is a matter of great importance that Regret's successor be an ally to the Sangheili," 'Valonro now seemed fully present, his mind sharpened once more.

“Why is that?” I asked.

The honor guard let out an involuntary noise, but ‘Yajadai interjected before ‘Valonro could formulate a disdainful response.

“Because, young one, blessed though the hierarchs may be, the Prophet of Truth is a known reformist—one who, as you have already seen, grants great boons to the Jiralhanae. Mercy is a mediator, one who kept peace between Truth and Regret, and wise though his counsel may be, he is concerned far more with spiritual matters than the politics that drive our Covenant. With the Changing of the Guard, our long-held position is at risk.”

These words were strange to hear. I had been educated to think of the Covenant as a single, united entity stewarded by the Prophets. It was their will that guided the Sangheili, for we were to serve as their protectors and enforcers on the path to transcendence. Such was sanctified by the Writ of Union.

No longer...

The notion that there was dissonance—even malcontent—between the hierarchs was most unwelcome. As a relative newcomer to the military of the Covenant, still yet to see extensive combat beyond training in the hunting domes, there was evidently much that I had to learn about those we had pledged our service to. I wondered what the other warriors among us thought of this, but they were patrolling far enough away that they either did not hear the councilor’s words or paid them no mind.

‘Yajadai stirred as he received an incoming transmission. He input a command on his wrist armor’s interface and projected a hologram of a San’Shyuum. Judging by the sudden snap to attention by the councilor and honor guard, this was clearly somebody of considerable importance.

“Hear these words from I, the Prophet of Exquisite Devotion.”

I glanced to my right as I could almost perceive the tension straining ‘Yajadai, who tightened his mandibles to hold at bay the reaction he truly desired to express.

“Blessed is this day for all of our Covenant as we stand on the precipice of the Great Journey’s summation. Alas, the passing of the High Prophet of Regret necessitates the appointment of a new hierarch, and so all Sangheili councilors are called upon to gather at the chamber of consecration. Ride now with all due haste, lest you tarry in the final hour and find yourselves left behind.”

As soon as the transmission ended my fellow Sangheili immediately set about making preparations to depart.

“Brothers,” ‘Yajadai called out to all of us present. “March with me. Onwards to the heart of this sacred ring!”

The others growled in affirmation and dutifully assembled into a single-file line behind the councilor and honor guard. How fortunate we were to have joined the Covenant at such a time, even among these fearful changes, we were here at the point of realizing all that this alliance had sought to achieve on the blood of our forefathers.

We made our way around a large rock which separated the central clearing from the winding path that led up to the great Forerunner door, which was itself the size of perhaps two or three Sangheili.

As the door parted upon our approach, we were greeted by a most unwelcome sight.

Over eight feet tall he stood, with a light grey, single-knotted beard that hung below a smirk framed by razor-sharp tusks. His armor was crimson,

accented with ivory, and his eyes... they looked as if he might be blind, but instead of milky white they too were a stark red. In one of his gauntleted hands, he held a death lobster casually by his waist, its curved underside bayonet stained with dark blood.

He was accompanied by his own entourage of Jiralhanae. Two were clad in the armor of an honor guard, while the other four wore the basic helmet, shoulder pauldrons, weapon harness, and primitive leg wrappings that were typical for those of low rank who were otherwise covered simply in their thick brown fur.

“What is the meaning of this?” High Councilor ‘Yajadai took a step forward, placing himself in front of ‘Valonro and the rest of our number.

The Jiralhanae leader made a show of sniffing the air, his scrutinous eyes scanning each of us as if assessing distant prey.

“We are here to *escort* you, Councilor,” he said.

“That will not be necessary, Thrallslayer,” ‘Yajadai responded immediately, his tone clipped. “As you can see, I already have an escort—of greater numbers.”

The Thrallslayer—whose fanged smile had only grown at ‘Yajadai’s use of his title—then turned to ‘Valonro, appraising the honor guard. “This one appears to be wearing armor that no longer belongs to him.” He gestured to his cohort, sneering. “We cannot depart without honoring the will of the Prophets in this matter.”

“I am Onsu ‘Valonro, honor guard to the Prophet of Regret and the Sacred Fleet of Consecration.” ‘Valonro spat on the ground. “Any *jir’a’ul* who would seek to claim this armor will have to *take* it.”

Silence hung in the air for a moment, tension boiling over as all present calculated the next move of their leaders. I, for one, had not anticipated

the possibility of fighting Covenant allies. Our enemy on this ring was supposed to be the humans.

But as I looked at the Thrallslayer and his fellows, I could see it in their eyes. Hunger and anticipation for violence.

“His blade!” One of the Sangheili standing close to ‘Yajadai spoke. “Look at his blade.”

The dark stains on the Thrallslayer’s bayonet, still hanging by his side, caught the light of the sun. It was not red, the color of human blood, but a deep violet. That of our own kind.

Before any of us could act, the Thrallslayer and his ilk fired their death lobbers upon us, instantly blasting through the energy shields of two of our number. I watched in horror as their abdomens burst apart from the explosives. Blood sprayed onto the ground, impact from fragments of shrapnel and bone caused my own shields to flare for a moment, and the concussive blast sent the initial two victims falling backwards. They were dead before their mangled bodies even hit the ground.

I reached for my plasma rifle, but already I was retreating along with four others of my rank. We were not seasoned warriors. I knew one of our number to have been a scribe who was made to serve for an annual cycle after offending his minister, and another was renowned for his ability to interpret and translate Huragok. It was neither shameful nor dishonorable for these Sangheili to be gentle of spirit, for strength flows from many rivers, but in the face of violence such as this, we stood little chance of prevailing.

The tactics and coordination of the Jiralhanae were quite unlike the low intelligence many Sangheili often claimed them to have. Three stayed back to provide covering fire with their brute shots while the others surged forward on all fours. They bounded towards us with incredible speed, at which point instinct took over and I at last began firing my weapon.

Bursts of superheated plasma impacted one of the Jiralhanae, instantly burning its fur, but even as it howled in pain and an acrid smell filled the air, it showed no signs of faltering.

We were joined then by Onsu 'Valonro, who had drawn his energy sword to cover us in close quarters.

“Keep firing!” The honor guard roared. “Focus your attacks together on a target.”

One of the Jiralhanae leapt into the air and 'Valonro swung his blade upwards while simultaneously traversing out of reach. The twin prongs sliced through the beast's waist and exited through its foot. The cut did not penetrate deep, but the Brute nonetheless collapsed to the ground in a heap, writhing and bellowing in agony.

We pulled further back to the central area where we had made our temporary camp, as there were large rocks which provided adequate cover from the grenadiers on higher ground.

As we moved, I caught a brief glimpse of High Councilor 'Yajadai, who had engaged the Thrallslayer himself in battle. A downward thrust from 'Yajadai's own blade carved the Jiralhanae leader's weapon in two, but as he attempted to recover from a spent state the Thrallslayer pressed his momentary advantage and delivered a stunning punch to 'Yajadai's face, knocking his ornate headdress askew as he fell to the ground and his sword flew from his grasp.

“I have the councilor,” the Thrallslayer roared in triumph. “Kill the others, then regroup at the bastion.”

The last I saw of High Councilor 'Yajadai was the Thrallslayer dragging him away and out of sight through the door, leaving just nine of us standing.

“Warriors,” ‘Valonro called to us. “Prepare to--”

The honor guard’s order was cut off, as at that moment the Jiralhanae he had critically wounded used its remaining strength to leap onto his back. The enormous beast’s weight pulled the Sangheili backwards with ease and we aimed our weapons but dared not fire. As they writhed and wrestled, none of us could confidently shoot without likely killing ‘Valonro.

Instead, I watched in horror as the wounded creature’s plan became clear. It was too late to act, to even attempt to prevent it, as more explosive shells from the brute shots pummeled the rocks and ground near our position.

‘Valonro attempted to dig his armored boots into the ground, to find purchase that would prevent him being dragged further backwards, but even—perhaps especially—an injured Jiralhanae was capable of drawing on immense reserves of strength. That was all it needed to bring the honor guard to the cliff edge, the overlook facing the chamber of consecration, where a fatal drop awaited them.

The Jiralhanae, its lower body soaked with blood, did not have a moment of hesitation before casting itself—and ‘Valonro—over the edge.

There was no time to react or mourn, there was no time to do anything other than try to survive. We few were still under siege.

As I knelt, my foot touched what I had not realized was the hilt of ‘Valonro’s energy sword. I picked it up as two other Jiralhanae advanced on our position, reversing their grips on their brute shots so that they approached us bayonets-first.

Four of our number scrambled out of cover in different directions, hoping that they would present too many targets for the grenadiers to hit, but the Jiralhanae up on the high ground were instead spurred on by this new challenge, intensifying their attacks. Dirt and rock burst with each impact,

and I heard several screams—I could not tell how many—as more rounds found their mark.

Holding my plasma rifle in one hand, I ignited ‘Valonro’s energy sword with the other, still retreating step-by-step as the two Jiralhanae continued to approach. I had their attention now and hoped that it might give the others time to escape.

My fellow Sangheili passed out of sight as I rounded a rocky corner. My eyes were fixed on the two Jiralhanae, whose expressions were inscrutable. Unlike the Thrallslayer, who had looked as if he could feast upon the joy of inevitable violence, these foes were inscrutable, their faces little more than expressionless masks. They sensed the end, my fear, and were absolutely focused on what I might do with the honor guard’s blade.

One made an intimidating additional step forward and I instinctively swung to ward the beast off. It was the miscalculation they had hoped for.

The other slammed into me as soon as the sword was lying spent, throwing me backwards into the hard rock wall. I felt the plasma rifle fly out of my hand from the impact and the Jiralhanae tossed it further afield, casting it over to a long, thin outcrop.

Pain shot through my body as the other Jiralhanae’s bayonet pierced my flesh, cutting through my ribs. Wine-dark blood stained the weapon as it was ripped from where it had penetrated, and I felt it flowing over my hand as I grasped at the wound—the pressure of my hands doing little to ease the ragged agony.

Their work done, the Jiralhanae did not bother to offer me a warrior’s end. They simply turned and marched away, ready to see to any others that might still survive.

I could do nothing to stop them, could barely manage to track their departure as the world swam before me.

Crumpling to the ground, I felt my attention drift from the sounds of combat to the view that lay before me: the great band of the sacred ring, of Halo, curving upwards. Vast continents were scattered among its ocean, rays of heavenly light piercing through the clouds which obscured the view of High Charity. If this was to be my fate, to die from a betrayal such as this, let it be in the realm of gods. Let this verdant paradise become my tomb.

Darkness crept at the edges of my vision, drowning my lingering remnants of consciousness, and I felt as if I were plummeting into the endless night of the Hall of Eternity.

But then I saw it.

A sphere of brilliant golden light burst in front of my eyes. A moment later, a figure was cast out from it.

A Sangheili warrior clad in silver armor.

The Arbiter.

He gathered himself for a moment, picking up my discarded plasma rifle from a nearby rock, and then approached. I saw him clearly then.

“The Brutes have betrayed us.” I weakly choked the words out as I felt the last of my strength leaving my body. “*The Councilors--*”

The Arbiter placed a hand upon me and took up the hilt of ‘Valonro’s energy sword from my grasp. The blade flashed to life, twin prongs of superheated plasma blazed with renewed and vengeful purpose.

My last thoughts were of the Psalm of Repose, of the softness of my uncle’s voice as my dwindling consciousness remembered how he sang its holy words by the shores of the Csurdon sea.

*With eyes aloft and tensions high
We gain that which we seek
Rejoice in thine keep's battle cry
A song to separate the weak
Of time it walks among us here
The blade comes for us all
But in our stead, we claim our dead
When echoed in the Hall*

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**BASTION OF THE BRUTES
DELTA HALO
NOVEMBER 3, 2552**

High Councilor Raas ‘Yajadai struggled to find focus as he slowly regained consciousness. Each arm was locked in an immobilizing grip by a Jiralhanae warrior on his left and right side. As they marched forward, ‘Yajadai’s feet dragged behind him across an ornate floor.

Amidst the chaos and confusion, ‘Yajadai tried to take in the situational enormity of it all. For decades he had fought and bled for the Covenant, serving across countless battlefields and ultimately within the High Council itself, all in effort to be exactly where he was right now. How many other generations had come before him? Each one desperate to be surrounded by unblemished alloy illuminated by ancient sconces amidst the low hum of arcane technology reverberating within the halls of the sacred ring.

And now, at the threshold of all he and his kind had fought for, he found himself wracked with doubt and apprehension. Nothing seemed to make sense—no element occupying its proper place.

“Take him to the upper level.”

‘Yajadai’s thoughts were interrupted by the Thrallslayer’s bellowed command. The councilor heard a thick door slide shut behind them as the Brutes began to drag him up a ramp located in the center of a modest antechamber. Once they reached the top of the ramp, they took a path to the left into a larger octagonal room with several smaller chambers built into the surrounding walls. ‘Yajadai felt a pang of anger at the notion that these chambers could once have been used for any number of untold purposes befitting the ring’s divine architects, but had now been repurposed into holding cells for those who must have opposed the Jiralhanae’s insipid scheme.

The Thrallslayer pointed a thick, furred finger towards a holding cell in the far corner of the upper level. “There.”

The Brute warriors pulled ‘Yajadai to the cell entrance and abruptly pushed him inside before activating a portable energy barrier placed at the cell’s entrance. As they stepped away, the Thrallslayer took their place, smugly leering into the holding chamber before finally speaking.

“Do you not think it a sign from your gods?”

“A sign?” ‘Yajadai echoed the words in confusion.

“That the High Prophet most closely concerned with the station of your kind would be the first to fall? Surely the weak must be culled before the Great Journey can commence.” The Thrallslayer grinned and grunted through battle-borne tusks. “Regret is who failed you. And now it’s what fills you.”

“You dare mock a Hierarch’s demise?” ‘Yajadai glared directly at the towering beast. “This is what a Brute finds worthy of transcendence?”

“*Transcendence*,” the Thrallslayer almost spat the word before continuing in a low growl. “If there is even such a thing.”

‘Yajadai clacked his mandibles twice. “Perhaps there isn’t. But at least we live with honor. With *purpose*.”

“And what purpose has this ring brought you?”

“I do not speak of the ring.” ‘Yajadai’s voice grew quieter but bolder. “I speak of my brothers. Bonds that transcend both duty and destiny.”

“What do you know of brotherhood?” the Thrallslayer replied. “It is not *your* kind the hierarchs feed to the front lines, to batter the redoubts and resolve of an empire’s enemies. You do not watch your brothers bleed without benefit across countless forgotten worlds. And when their bones are turned to glass alongside the corpses of our prey, you do not watch others reap the renown of a victory unearned. No, Councilor—*our* time has finally come. And we will not relinquish it for the sake of what you call honor.”

The air hung silent for several moments.

“Avitus,” ‘Yajadai spoke the Jiralhanae’s true name with a subdued but intentional tone of respect. “I have seen you serve. I know what it is to bleed for your brothers—and to bear the stain of their blood on your own hands. But know this: The Great Journey does not include you in the way that you think it does. The Prophets can discard you just as they have discarded my kind. They are steering the ship on this journey. We are simply manning the oars.”

As the grizzled chieftain pondered a response, their exchange was interrupted by the screech of a Kig-Yar entering the chamber from the lower level.

“Mighty Thrallslayer!” The Jackal squawked. “Aelius and Ignis send word. They bring back traitor Lekgolo and new councilor for questions.”

The Thrallslayer paused for a moment before responding. “Excellent, prepare new cells for their arrival.”

As he turned back towards ‘Yajadai, the Sangheili councilor spoke.

“Think upon my words, Avitus. If not for yourself, then for those who follow you.”

The Thrallslayer snarled. “It is you who will be doing the thinking. In the back of your chamber, you shall find a plasma rifle, and with it comes a choice: acknowledge your shame and demonstrate penitence for your actions by searing your own stain from this ring you hold so sacred... Or wait for my return, and I will gut you slowly myself under the gaze of your fellow councilors and co-conspirators. The path is yours to choose.”

Despite the Jiralhanae’s threats, a strange sense of peace gently draped over ‘Yajadai’s shoulders. A feeling of clarity, as if something he hadn’t known was obscuring his vision had suddenly cleared.

He remembered the end of the Age of Doubt, how his fellow Sangheili and San’Shyuum councilors alike were filled with zealous fervor as they roared with rapturous joy at the Ninth Age of Reclamation’s coming, each of them trying to shout the loudest.

That time had come again. A new Age had surreptitiously arrived, ushered in not with cheer and unity of purpose, but with the sharpened silence of blades in the dark.

“My path is already set, Avitus.” ‘Yajadai spoke. “It is *you* who has yet to choose.”