

Tales of the UNSC's Valkyries

By Lojak (Psst! That's my online name)

Preface

This collection of stories is primarily for fun. Any lore inaccuracies or grammatical errors are unintentional. This is not edited to a publishing standard. This is for me but I want to share in the fun I am having.

That being said, if you do wish to read on, this work includes description of graphic violence and child soldiers, and includes the use of lewd humor and uses language rated for PG-13 movies.

A big thank you to my incredible spouse and writing buddy for always being there to catch my your's and you're's (She didn't read this part, so Lord knows how it turned out).

I hope you enjoy Tales of the UNSC's Valkyries.

The First Time Falling

Chapter 6

Operation Black Cat, +06:03:23:37

Uvranelo, Bur-duk Region

The Covenant dropship slid sideways across the sky the way a hockey enforcer prowls the ice looking for someone to bash skulls with. Its nose cannon swung left to right sniffing out anything to melt with superheated plasma. Both of the ship's side doors were lowered, revealing a squat, ugly alien manning a plasma turret on either side. The UNSC designated this vessel as a Phantom gunship. The craft may be more gunship than transport, but as Eoin watched the belly of the Phantom drift out of view, he worried about the danger that waited inside it.

The alien ship spelled doom for the operation even before Gambit-2 walked a hundred meters.

Eoin leaned against a thick tree, his chameleon-like armor projecting a distorted image of the very same velvety trunk. The barrel of his gun continued to track the ship even as the thick jungle canopy obscured it from the naked eye.

Bullets would simply bounce off its energy shields, but the Spartan couldn't stand the idea of getting turned into a steaming crater without at least shooting back at the thing that did it.

On the HUD, the Phantom gained a blinking red outline, the words Target Lock-M41/G-2-2 next to it. A red line connected the ship to the jungle where the squad's pair of scouts lay hidden, their unit's only anti-vehicle weapon already locked and loaded. Three additional lines marked the ship as troopers peeked out to add their sensor data to the network guidance algorithm, aiding in triangulating the moving target.

Eoin and those not targeting the Phantom used their suite of sensors to observe the patches of sky that could be scanned through the tree canopy. His HUD kicked back the result, Negative Returns. The Spartan unclenched his jaw and damned ONI for not preparing a better satellite network for Operation Black Cat. As of right now, he had no eyes in the sky to let him know if more Covenant craft were patrolling the area.

A yellow stand-by pip blinked next to G-2-2, the other Spartan signaling they were ready to let a pair of rockets fly.

Two rockets set to anti-air mode wouldn't be enough firepower to take down the Covenant gunship. Standard protocol was to fire six rockets simultaneously to guarantee a Phantom turned into a debris cloud of scrap metal. A pair of trained soldiers - and Eoin thought a paratrooper and a Spartan met that qualification - could reload and fire that rocket launcher fast, but not before the ship's nose gun could swing around and start making craters in the jungle.

Eoin sent everyone a single *chirp*, a simplified audio order for "Hold Position."

As he assessed the situation, he came to two conclusions. The first being how screwed they were. *Damn aliens*, he swore to himself. Then he damned ONI for coming up with such a hairbrained mission, finally he called the Valkyrie a few choice names. The bitch wanted to see Eoin and the Spartans fail, and she was getting her wish.

Unless those Grunts manning the door turrets were blind, the little aliens should have already spotted the human-made drop pods still steaming in their craters twenty meters away. If they were blind or stupid, the gunship's sensors had

them covered, regardless. Those pods should be unidentifiable scrap right now, standard protocol for a stealth insertion was immediate self-destruction.

A new silent series of swear words rolled through Eoin's mind, there the more colorful ones he learned from Da's soldier buddies. Eoin should have led his squad further into the jungle after he arrived with Hood; instead, he bone-headedly decided to brief them on the spot.

Why hadn't I followed protocol? Eoin started to spiral into the pits of self-blame, wanting to examine his field decisions for where he first screwed up. Before he could lose himself in that unhelpful pit, he took a deep breath and grounded himself in the moment. *Phantom is here. Deal with that. Then when I'm not dead, scold myself.*

The second conclusion he came to was how sharp his squad was. No one panicked in the face of certain superheated death. Each trooper kept frosty. The targeting lasers were assigned, spotters were watching for additional hostiles, and trigger fingers were disciplined and held just above trigger guards. They were keyed up to fight, but no one was going to lose their shit and make a mistake.

Eoin's confidence in his people soared just from seeing this display of professionalism. And for that he felt a touch of shame. Had he really thought they would freak out at first contact? Lance Corporal Evie Olson might be the greenest of the bunch but even she had a dozen more drops than Eoin - with the mechanical fingers to prove it. She lay on her back under a giant root, rifle tracking along with everyone else's weapon.

The gunship did as Eoin feared but expected. It circled wide around the OPR squad's LZ, canons sweeping the tree line. Twice, Eoin looked straight down the barrel of the nose gun as it passed over his hiding spot.

"Get ready for a gun fight," he spoke softly, projecting calm.

Instant green confirmations blinked in his HUD.

A hundred assault plans played out in Eoin's mind, preparing for whatever the Phantom and its passengers might do. The worst scenario, and most likely, is the crew of the gunship would notify their higher ups of the drop pods. It would hang there in the sky on high alert watching for any movement, then after a few minutes the sky would be full of more Phantom gunships, Banshees fighter craft, and possibly something bigger. The operation would be blown and it would be a fight of survival that would ultimately end in some form of last stand, guerilla

tactics, suicide mission to blow up something that in the end was of minimal importance to the war effort.

At least it will be a fun few days of killing aliens. Eoin resigned himself to that coming fate.

A burst of blue flashes from a door turret ripped through Kingsley's drop pod, cooking off the last few ounces of fuel left in the tank. Bits of titanium alloy rained down around the remains of the pod. It looked like a pumpkin after a boy scout revealed their smuggled away fireworks, its top blown out revealing a cavity of stringy oily bits.

The Grunt manning the gun cheered, then swiveled over to let out another burst of plasma fire. Eoin's pod popped. The turret's barrel pointed at Olson's pod next. As the enthusiastic Grunt pressed the trigger, a tall loping alien in gleaming armor stepped up behind the ugly creature and struck it upside the head. The turret swung wild and plasma bolts ripped through the tree line. Around Eoin, branches exploded with sharp *cracks* as the moisture inside them violently flash boiled. The tree trunks thick enough to not be turned into splinters smoldered with orange embers ringing a new hole in the wood.

Eoin tracked one energy bolt as it zipped into the squad's hiding place, right towards Shahar. A blue flash emanated at the trooper's head, and a horrific yelp sounded in Eoin's helmet.

Before Eoin's visor unpolarized from the brilliant light burst, the Spartan covered half the distance to his man.

"I'm okay! I'm okay!" Shahar shouted, no doubt more to himself. "Oh God, I'm okay!"

Disciplined, Shahar hadn't moved from his covered position behind a large, arching, braided cord of tree roots. From the root, inches from his face plate, steam and smoke drifted up from the splintered remains left by the errant plasma fire.

Eoin froze in place, relief flooding through him like a cold rain washing away the adrenaline.

Careful to not make more noise than he already had, Eoin did a quick check of Shahar's vitals. Nothing to be concerned about beyond a highly elevated heart rate. To the Hell Jumper's credit, that heart rate was already returning back to normal levels as Shahar regained his composure.

“Our position is still good,” Hood said. “Looks like that Grunt is busy getting smoked out by the hinge head. Boy, does that split-jawed bastard look pissed!”

Truly keyed up now, Eoin made the order, “G-2, I want us ready to eliminate that gunship if necessary. Split into three elements. Forward scouts, you're Foxtrot. Keep the big gun on that gunship and jump on any opportunity you see. Better yet, first priority is to keep the skies clear of any smaller aircraft that want to come say hello to their friends.”

Two green affirmatives blinked.

“Everyone else,” he continued, “reposition on the tree line. Alpha/Bravo formation. Space apart wide, I want their attention split into as many directions as possible if this has to get loud.”

More green affirmative pips blinked.

The troopers silently crept to the edge of the jungle tree line, splitting into two three-man groups. On either side of Eoin crouched Kingsley and Olson. Thanks to their data uplink, he could see where every crosshair drifted in tiny circles, making his view of the Grunt and Elite reminiscent of old thriller flicks where snipers - for some unknown, baffling reason - pointed lasers at people's foreheads and dress ties. Each alien asshole had three red dots on them, two for the chest and one for the head.

“Chief,” Kingsley whispered - a tough instinct to shake even though his helmet was sound proofed - “you seeing how that bird keeps drifting to one side, then the pilot corrects for it?”

“Yeah.” Eoin didn't add the implied, “and why should I care?” Kingsley wouldn't waste his time - he hoped.

“Poor maintenance. I think this is a *hangar queen*,” Kingsley said. At the trooper's command a new pointer tracked across Eoin's HUD circling parts of the Phantom's sleek hull. “And look at that. Missing panel just aft of the nose gun. This ol' girl is missing bits-and-bobs left and right.”

“I think he is right,” Shahaar added. “From this side, I can see a portion of her starboard thrust controllers. They've been stripping this ship for parts.”

Backwater planet, the message appeared. Ship maintenance is a bitch in the best of circumstances.

“You’re thinking, hoping that they don’t have a proper comms unit aboard,” Eoin asked his squad sergeant.

“Would explain why they are still alone,” Kingsley said. “They probably drew the short straw to go check out some pointless debris-fall in a ship that isn’t mission critical.”

“Shit,” Shahar said, “I bet this bird isn’t even on the books anymore. Damn, I think I can see straight through its ass to the cockpit.”

Once the missing components were pointed out, it became glaringly obvious that this craft should have been grounded. It wasn’t space or air worthy. Which made things worse for Eoin.

The situation wasn’t as dire as first believed, and with every new transmission between his troopers he could feel their energy levels rise. The UNSC had bred soldiers like this to have a bias - no, a craving - for action. They didn’t see a functioning gunship anymore, one that could gain the advantage of altitude and bring heavy weapons raining down on their heads. No, instead they saw a pack of idiots caught with their pants down asking for a serious spanking, as his Da would have put it.

“Stay frosty everyone,” Eoin said. He felt the leash on his devil dogs going taut as they started to snap their jaws.

It would be best if that ship just flew off to try and get back in range with a comm relay, Eoin thought. He figured once it left to go report its finding they could slip away and leave the aliens scratching their heads. Not ideal, as suspicion would be heightened and more patrols might blanket the skies. That would be better than trying to dodge a heavy plasma cannon less than fifty meters away.

Then the damndest thing happened. The Phantom lowered itself to the ground right dab smack in the middle of the remaining drop pods. The very ones that had **Self Destruct**, **Armed** blinking in red on Eoin’s HUD.

Well...shit. Eoin remembered he too was bred by the UNSC to have a bias for swift, violent, overwhelming action. Especially for idiots looking for a serious spanking. *If they are going to make it this easy...*

Stunned by the sheer dumb luck of it all, Eoin looked at Kingsley and gave him the universal, “Why the hell not,” shrug. In reply, Kingsley returned the shrug with the universal, “I guess, might as well,” tilt of the head. Then in a voice that was trepidatious of pissing off lady luck, and having the rug suddenly yanked out from under them, Kingsley broadcasted, “Prepare for Self Destruct. Brace... Blast. Blast. Blast.”

While Eoin had been gawking at the easiest take down in Spartan history, he hadn't lost focus. His barrel still tracked the lead Jackal that disembarked from the craft. A lanky bird-like alien species that forgot to pack a set of wings as it evolved. This particular Jackal, squawking something over his shoulder at the Elite bitching at him, found out first what 6 kilograms of KA-26 - better known as Blamite - feels like when it goes critical. To Eoin's dislike, the alien probably only felt that pain for nanosecond before becoming a cloud of disentangled molecules mixed with UNSC titanium.

All the pods, including the ones used for target practice, flashed into nothingness, sending out lethal chunks of metal in all directions. The most important direction being right toward the Phantom and its crew. Eoin's million dollar eyes caught the brief instant the ship's shield flared white hot before cracking under the sudden gale of thermal-kinetic energy thrown against its capacitors. Titanium and ceramic flak shredded the craft, peeling the hull apart as if it were made of paper mache. The passengers fared even worse.

One hunk of metal, clearly looking to earn a medal from fleet command, threaded the needle between the ship's armor plating and port thruster housing, striking a component that was clearly never meant to be touched by something traveling at supersonic speeds. A second explosion, nearly as violent as the first but no less spectacular, threw the Phantom forward nose first into the ground. The other thruster automatically tried to correct for this, but this just made the Phantom start spinning, pivoting around the nose, digging it deeper into the ground.

This also turned out to be a catastrophic issue for the vessel, as a new blue jet of fire erupted out of the craft's forward dorsal line, making the whole thing look like a breakdancing purple whale caught in a sneezing fit. After that, Eoin lost track of all the other catastrophic failures tearing the ship apart from the inside out, causing the craft to move in ways that made the previous acts of rebellion against physics seem like a warm up act to the true absurdity.

The most miraculous thing about the entire light show was that not a single piece of shrapnel ever flew anywhere near Eoin or his troopers. The rain of metal

and fire contained itself to the clearing of the jungle. Less than a dozen seconds after Kingsley uttered Blast, the Phantom had completed its destiny of becoming only a pile of scrap parts. It just did it on the UNSC terms. And on fire.

“Well...” Kingsley said first.

“Yeah...” Eoin replied. At that moment decided he would never see something that chaotically spectacular ever again in his life.

Holy god, a message blinked. The forward scouts witnessing the series cosmic flocks through the rest of the squad’s cameras.

“Someone recorded all that, right?” Sahar asked. A rhetorical question, everyone’s gear was constantly recording because no way would ONI not want data to nitpick from an operation like this.

Everyone’s mood had shifted from bloodlust to dazed wonderment. Had all of that really just happened?

“If I see this video on the internet, I’ll personally plunge my hand in your... Whoa!” A burst of plasma bolts cut Kingsley off.

From the wreckage, an Elite in cooked, smoking armor crawled out, weapon first. The micromanager from before. He roared, his four mandible-like jaws spreading wide, and squeezed the trigger, blindly shooting into the jungle. Six crosshair icons swarmed it, as the troopers reenaged. Two more Elites crawled out behind the first, looking just as rough as the first. Their personal energy shields had saved them from the once in a universe event.

“Chief?” Kingsley asked for new orders.

That was an easy decision.

“Eliminate with prejudice,” Eoin said. “Weapons free.”